



Romanticism on the Net

Olivia's Kingdoms: Corresponding with Carby's *Imperial Intimacies* in *The Woman of Colour*

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Abstract

This essay takes up and practices related methodologies from Hazel Carby's *Imperial Intimacies*: correspondence and "always progressing backwards." The essay posits that *Imperial Intimacies* and *The Woman of Colour* correspond across time, both as works about the enfleshment of "imperial intimacies" and as formal articulations of Black being in/through contradiction. Anachronisms in the novel demonstrate the contingency of historical understanding that allows *The Woman of Colour* to be read necessarily as both an imperial and anti-imperial work. Correspondence in both works to invert Hegel's configuration of self-other, thereby creating the possibility for unfixed intersubjectivity. Reading *The Woman of Colour* with Carby (ac)knowledges Olivia Fairchild's taxonomic shifting from human to animal to plant and back not only as reiterating the Linnean/Enlightenment threshold of Black life's creation/destruction but also, following Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, a rupture of humanist unity through/to the mutability of Black being.

Biographical Note

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Citing is not easy. Referencing is hard.

—Kathrine McKittrick, “Footnotes” (17)

When I assembled the various pieces I found that rather than cohere into a unified narrative their juxtaposition revealed the shards of conflict and contradiction that familial, national and imperial ideologies work to conceal.

—Hazel Carby, *Imperial Intimacies* (2)

The materiality of black life, of colonized life, of enslaved life, does not correspond to the archival codification of knowledge and I was searching for ways of knowing and being disregarded, silenced or unimagined.

—Hazel Carby, *Imperial Intimacies* (233)

1. This essay argues that *The Woman of Colour* is comprised both from Enlightenment narratives of unity—of universal reason, universal humanity, and universal and economic progress—and from contrary impulses to dissolve imperialism and its effects. Rather than thwarting the coherence of the novel, these contradictions offer a means of reading and resisting the hold Enlightenment ideals exert on *The Woman of Colour*. Integral to this thinking through contradiction, especially the contradictions inherent in unities underwritten by the Atlantic slave trade and European imperialism, is a wresting of history

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and humanism (and by extension realism) from the Enlightenment's seemingly coherent, stable, and reverent positions of white Man. Destabilizing the progressive model of history and its universal-*cum*-discriminatory humanism steps toward realizing Black life in a novel that otherwise works through the exploitation and obliteration of Black being.

2. A key function, if not the function, of humanism is the “on-going imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as the human itself” (Wynter 260). As Sylvia Wynter demonstrates, this unites humanity falsely, disingenuously, within a single genre of the human. Wynter lays bare the epistemic transformations in which early modern “lay humanists” overwrote onto the Christian distinction of “spiritual perfection/imperfection” a new “‘idea of order’ on whose basis the coloniality of being enacted by the dynamics of the relationship between Man—overrepresented as the generic, ostensibly supracultural human—and its subjugated Human others (i.e., Indians and Negroes), together with, as Quijano notes, the continuum of new categories of the human” (288). This racialized continuum locates Blackness as the threshold “between rational humans and irrational animal” following the refiguration of the Chain of Being by Linnaeus among others (300). Enlightenment thinkers’ pronouncement of “specific European logic” as “Universal reason” formalized, albeit implicitly, the contradiction Wynter exposes (Stoler 215; see also Smith 231–63). This racialized continuum also posits one history, uniting all peoples within a developmental narrative, all moving forward, though in different stages, toward “Universal reason,” a reasoning that was and is never comprehensively human, let alone universal. Mediating through and against the “Coloniality of

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Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” *The Woman of Colour* (ef)faces Enlightenment’s restricted universals and their constrained forms of history.

3. Although Wynter facilitates the theorization of this destabilizing dynamic, I experientially accessed these critiques of humanism through Hazel Carby’s *Imperial Intimacies*, by reading it and *The Woman of Colour* together and attending to their correspondence—the manner in which both works pursue what Carby calls those shared “ways of knowing and being disregarded” by white understanding (233). Carby and *The Woman of Colour* evoke Wynter’s analysis and forms of thought, but likewise many other correspondences. In so doing, they necessarily evince resonances, references, and contradictions that allow for a polyvocal reading of both texts. As I fretted about the vetting of this essay with particular regard to its prolonged interpretive plaiting, I thought, “If it’s a bust, if necessary, I can flip it, rewriting the paper for potential publication in another context mainly by removing Carby to better unify the argument.”

4. Yet the essay in its current form resists imperatives for critical unity and seeks, primarily not supplementally, to reference Carby’s methodology in *Imperial Intimacies* in order to loosen and shift history and humanism from the analytical and formal unity that stabilizes Enlightenment. As such, the essay engages particularly with the form of *Imperial Intimacies* and its theoretical engagement with *correspondence*, a means of reference that does not subjugate or absorb the other. Carby’s book often brings her embodied experience into/as historical context to en flesh and recover disappeared Black life. As literary rather than autobiographical analysis, this essay cannot adopt wholesale Carby’s autobiographical

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methods, for instance, by situating my white and queer embodiments in relation to *The Woman of Colour*. Rather, the essay takes on Carby's methods, particularly correspondence, with other texts and analytical strands, as a means of (re)experiencing the novel. Akin to *Imperial Intimacies*, the essay struggles to reference its sources without dissolving them, without unifying them in a fixed horizon. It works through contradiction to bring its sources together in a weaving that does not absorb each thread into a whole. Its form twists to (ac)knowledge enfleshment and also necessarily to (ac)knowledge the mutability of all enfleshments.

5. Form and theoretical engagement with *correspondence* coincide in the epistolarity of *The Woman of Colour*, and they enable the novel's curious mobility among imperial taxonomies of being, its movement toward and with Wynter's unsettling. Corresponding across more than two centuries, *The Woman of Colour* and *Imperial Intimacies* exist in an impossible kind of limbic resonance; they co-operate to destabilize the hold that history and humanism exert on Black life. Eager to accept responsibility, I am tempted to claim any mess below as my shortcoming, but perhaps the shortcoming is the "my" in that figuration—an undoing of "who we think we are," an undoing of how I have been humanized to think, undoing in search of "know[ing] differently" (McKittrick 18n16). McKittrick calls for the "sharing of ideas (no beginnings, no ends)" because it "enables a terrain of struggle, through which different futures are imagined" (25). May the mess be an ongoing struggle for ethical intersubjectivity that sustains legibility through the difficulty of not-subjugating, not-absorbing, but rather of referencing Carby, Black knowing, and Black life more broadly.

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6. In her remarks at the 2021 Black Studies and Romanticism conference, Kerry Sinanan insisted that Romanticism needs Black studies, not vice versa. Yes. Black studies disrupts with or without Romanticism and eighteenth-century studies. Yet the ways in which I know I could think-by-means-of-Carby and then disappear her communication and guidance in the final form of my analysis of *The Woman of Colour* (not to mention the seeming imperative of so doing with regard to outlets for disciplined publication) bespeak the extractive propensity for the institutions of literary study in Romanticism and long eighteenth century studies to absorb rather than transform (Nicolazzo 233, 244–45). To restate Sinanan’s declaration: founded on the creation/destruction of Black and Indigenous being, these fields insist upon white humanism so as to never know otherwise (Nicolazzo 248; Makonnen 18–20).

7. Carby’s *Imperial Intimacies* gets to and at the long eighteenth century, particularly its British transatlanticism, as field or grounding such that the book yields historical knowledge without reinscribing the past, the white imperial structures that might be misunderstood to generate this history. It integrates into its exemplary archival research an attention to matters of life across time. As such, Carby jostles form. She creates a generically unruly book: perhaps an archivally and intellectually extensive memoir, perhaps an autobiographical analysis situated by cultural studies, Black British history, and (post)colonialism. *Imperial Intimacies* refuses the structural throughline that *memoir*, *analysis*, or even Carby’s own term, *tale*, suggest and instead composes an “architecture . . . having the tensile strength of a spider’s web spun across the Atlantic” (3).

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Carby knits a pliant network of interdependent strands that, although they nearly balance one another, are not cast uniformly to establish a unified account. This is an architecture seemingly impossible in its spatial and historical extension, designed to accommodate analysis through unsettling subjectivities. The composition (ac)knowledges and knows through the “conflict and contradiction that familial, national, and imperial ideologies work to conceal” (2).

8. *Imperial Intimacies* reprises this language (from its preface) in the final chapter where Carby refers with self-effacing wit and conscious hubris to her persistent pursuit of a unifying answer, “the key to unravelling the knotty complexities, contradictions and contestations of imperial national belonging” (316). This reprise is reverberation, not the conventional repetition of scholarly monograph but rather one of numerous instances in which *Imperial Intimacies* loops back to (re)connect and thereby realign meanings teased out from vast contradiction. Such recurrence is integral to Carby’s methodology as she described it following her April 2021 lecture “Imperial Accounting” at Dartmouth’s Leslie Center for the Humanities: to be “always progressing backwards.” This approach is not the key to *Imperial Intimacies*; it does not fix or unify the web the book tells. Rather, it offers theoretical configuration for referencing Carby and reading *The Woman of Colour* through *Imperial Intimacies*. To be “always progressing backwards” does not reiterate a/the linear history of the liberal humanist present; rather, it corresponds actively with the past in a manner akin to *Sankofa*, “part of the Akan philosophical tradition” which also has become a Black “Diasporan *practice*” (Temple 127). The Asante term is most often translated as “go back and fetch it” or “it is not taboo to go back and retrieve what you have forgotten

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or lost,” emphasizing the materiality of this process. Carby reiterates as enfolded action, not ideological repetition but a means of return and refusal that carries the past into the present to (ac)knowledge “the precarities of the afterlives of slavery” and “Black life insisted from death” (Sharpe 5, 17).

A Strand Opening to Correspondence through Carby’s Methodology in *Imperial Intimacies*, or, This Essay’s Curious Methods Section

9. In the chapter titled “Correspondence,” Carby writes, “The materiality of black life, of colonized life, of enslaved life does not correspond to the archival codification of knowledge and I was searching for ways of knowing and being disregarded, silenced, unimagined” (233). She continues, “Colonial lives do not correspond to the realities imagined in colonial accounting; their presence has to be prised out of the cracks between rows and columns and sentences” (235). Turning to the archive for what it withholds, Carby (re)joins the backwards work of scholars including Nicole Aljoe, Marisa Fuentes, and Saidiya Hartman, who leverage Black being in the present to (re)generate Black life obliterated across the long eighteenth century.

10. *Correspondence* emerges as a vital figure of imperial intimacies, although it must be noted that the above quotations mark its negation. Susan Manning situates *correspondence*, via Samuel Johnson, as a critical term of the eighteenth century: “Correspondence was a form of analogy that built propriety and proportion into human relations. . . . The sense of propriety . . . implied both responsiveness to and responsibility for the other” (13–14).

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Carby transforms the term, gathering into it discourse, bodily contact, and Black being to realize relations otherwise concealed by white imperial projects reliant on disingenuous logics of “responsiveness and responsibility” to uplift all humanity toward European “civilization.” Enacting this return to correspondence or correspondence’s return amid its disastrous failures, *Imperial Intimacies* is “always progressing backwards,” (re)generating connection from absence and across time.

11. Carby’s chapter title “Correspondence” refers most directly to a series of letters written by military and governmental bureaucrats regarding her Black Jamaican father, his negotiation of life in England following the end of World War II, and chiefly his request to be discharged from the RAF “in the United Kingdom and not in Jamaica where he was recruited” (240). Such a discharge was contrary to procedure, which sought to keep Black British soldiers from settling anew in England, and Carby marks the implicit racism and attendant “proprietary” concealment that define the communication regarding her father’s future. As suggested above, *correspondence* has direct formal pertinence to *The Woman of Colour* as epistolary novel, and the import of the “Correspondence” chapter’s letters demonstrate the relevance of content, particularly regarding transatlantic colonial experience, or “imperial intimacy” with emphasis on the etymology of *intimacy*, hovering between the innermost of *intimus* (England as colonial center) and *intimāre*, according to the OED, “to announce or notify by legal process” (the articulations of colonial control).

12. Around the bureaucratic communication regarding her father, Carby triangulates (1) her childhood, white English headmistress’s lesson that “[p]enmanship . . . reveals qualities of

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character” (*Imperial Intimacies* 222); (2) her father’s elegant right-handed writing and the caning he received as a student for writing with his left, rendering that hand deformed; and (3) the British character of the eighteenth-century white clerk revealed by his elegant calligraphic writing in a slave register, “presenting a regime of truth that governs visibility” and creating “order from disorder,” “a symptom of imperial insanity” (261). Carby explains that her conceptualization of these connections emerged from tracing with her own finger the English round hand in the early nineteenth-century Jamaican registers of the enslaved (227). The above triangle of correspondence gives shape and mass to the often-violent ways racialized bodies come together and are (dis)ordered within colonialism and its discourses.

13. Fundamental to the method of *Imperial Intimacies* is Carby’s attention—astonishingly generous, resolute, and, at points, mortifying—to her own spatial and bodily experiences of the places, archives, and memories she (re)visits in the book’s development. Her negotiation of correspondence persistently attends to “vibrant, fleshy, chaotic, morbid materiality” (174).¹ For instance, overwhelmed by facing records of her Jamaican family, she roves in the archive, envious of smokers just outside the building, envious of their “addiction and their solidarity in non-conformity” (239). She also refuses to unify her subjectivity. Her figuration of “the girl” constitutes the enfleshed experience of her childhood self, its memory trace, entangled though never united with her contemporary being. Carby acknowledges a correspondence of being and meaning, of flesh and thought, that never defers to the lineal. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s *Becoming Human* enables much of the analyses at the end of this essay. Her work enters here, though, because it too

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emphasizes *correspondence* as a critical term “denoting connection, interplay, and communication in place of and against the normativity that legislates intersubjectivity in the Hegelian terms of the Self-Other relation” (73–74). Correspondence, always remembering the enfleshment of form and the mutability of enfleshment, moves relationally across subjects, collateral to the demands of unified/restricted interpretation.

14. Read as a work of and about correspondence beyond propriety, *Imperial Intimacies* enacts resistant strains of intersubjectivity in its form as well as its content: the book interpolates sourced quotations graphically onto the page, surrounding them with the text of Carby’s tale, formatting them akin to pull quotes. Rather than integrate these into the prose, thereby maintaining authorial control, subjugating the quotation to and positioning it within an authorial voice, Carby allows others’ words to resonate alongside her own—to correspond. In so doing, she disrupts the ways signaling, citation, and other conventions manage textual intersubjectivity, maintaining the text’s forward current to diminish or even efface that which exceeds it or moves otherwise.²

15. Always progressing backwards, Carby interweaves the “vibrant, fleshy, chaotic, morbid” into accumulating connections that, like the reprised language noted above, span the book. Chapter 1, “Where Are You From?” reads, “The girl longed to bring the magic and promise of the outside indoors. One evening she crawled under the shrubbery, trapped a hedgehog in a shoebox, smuggled it into her room and into bed to keep as a friend” (8). Corresponding with the question of this chapter’s title, “[m]eaning, of course, are you black or white?” (15) to which no adequate answer was available to/from “the girl”—this choreographic

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anecdote evokes loneliness, estrangement, as well as need for control in the “trapping” and, in the “smuggling,” a willingness to transgress in sites of repose and physical vulnerability, to internalize the outside. The book’s final chapter recounts a recent visit to her father’s residential care home:

I was about to walk past small, brown clods of earth. . . . From under the rhododendrons and holly, hedgehogs had emerged and were rootling about. I held my breath. The girl adored hedgehogs; she longed to care for, . . . to sleep and dream with hedgehogs. The girl angered her mother when she found one . . . and smuggled it up to her bedroom and into her bed. . . . Iris [my mother] screamed ‘fleas!’ . . . [T]he girl was deposited in the bath for a thorough cleansing. As hedgerows in Britain have disappeared, so too have hedgehogs. (338)

This reprising recurrence pulls in/out numerous sets of correspondence about becoming British assembled between the first and final chapters. Iris’s cry of “fleas!” and her disciplining of Carby resonate with “ideologies of empire and beliefs of whiteness”: responsibility to British female norms, working-class respectability, and whiteness, all upheld through cleanliness and concomitant purity; the conception of Black British and American soldiers in England during World War II as an event of “contagion”; and that which underpins all this—Britishness as whiteness defined in opposition to Black people as, in the words of Achille Mbembe’s succinct summary of Hegel in Enlightenment contradiction, “human entities incapable of ridding themselves definitively of the animal presence with which they were mixed” (12). At the book’s close, the estrangement of “the

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girl” carries—corresponds with—all this. Likewise, the persistent pleasure an adult Carby experiences from the hedgehogs shows steadfast capacities for return, resistance, and transgression. *Imperial Intimacies* works to invert “the Hegelian terms of the Self-Other relation” (Jackson 74). Through destabilizing reprisal, it brings into relation that which is integral to and also integrally hidden within the Johnsonian notion of correspondence as having “built propriety and proportion into [white humanist] human relations.” Carby enacts the potential for recursive enfolded correspondence to unsettle.

A Strand Tracing *The Woman of Colour’s* Correspondence with Carby’s Explicitly Contradictory Methodologies

16. From the words that open *The Woman of Colour*, Olivia Fairfield, too, progresses backwards. Beginning her first letter, Olivia situates herself as “[l]aunched on a new world,” reversing the colonial configuration of the Americas as the *mundus novus* (53), their newness grounded both in their relatively recent “discovery” and their placement in an earlier phase of the ““progress of human culture,”” eighteenth-century confidence that “improvement had occurred or eventually would take place across virtually all fronts of human life” (Spadafora 13). In this initial letter, Olivia proceeds with an account of her birth, parentage, and education. Such introduction is commonplace in eighteenth-century novels, so much so that, for instance, Henry Fielding’s *Jonathan Wild* and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* open thusly to satirical ends. Olivia’s initial account is “backwards” not only in its return to the past but also because of her longstanding intimacy with the letter’s recipient: Mrs. Milbanke, her “earliest . . . and best friend” and “governess” (53). Certainly,

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this introduction serves a practical function for readers, but it also foregrounds recursive movement, not just that of repetition but of turning back. Deven Parker demonstrates that the “material realities of transatlantic correspondence”—the transport of letters to Jamaica through the imperiled packet network—(re)figure Olivia’s precarity as a woman of color in colonial Britain (135). The form of the novel is one of embattled return, particularly in the absence of contributions from Mrs. Milbanke: Olivia’s letters indicate communication from Milbanke never explicitly included in the novel. Parker also emphasizes that Olivia’s racialized body “reveals the sin through which she was brought into the world” (145). Her *vibrant, fleshy, chaotic, morbid materiality* as a woman of color is a persistent marker of her parents’ imperial intimacy, its violent imbalance of power, and its relation to Olivia only from her father following her mother’s death in labor. The opening tale of Olivia’s birth and parentage insinuates that movement away from Jamaica increases the constraining legibility of and spectatorial focus on Olivia’s body as itself a return. Proximity to England intensifies “‘the scoptic regime’ of modernity” in which Blackness is used to define a “paradigmatic axis . . . of negation and dissociation,” “the spectrum against which whiteness was imagined” (Gikandi 44, 45).³ Carby, as a girl in England, continually confronting the question, “Where are you from?” also faced the ongoing legacy of Blackness as return, in Carby’s case, the return to an outside—outside the fiction of a white Britain—that precedes her by generations. In fact, the date of this outside’s institution is roughly contemporaneous with Olivia Fairfield’s conception, her being conceived.

17. *The Woman of Colour*, in its end, realizes Olivia’s *vibrant, fleshy, chaotic, morbid* return, doing so with a difference as Olivia, rather than being pressed back to her origins in Jamaica,

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sets sail for her island home through her own negotiation and choice.⁴ Olivia leaves the novel by progressing backwards, her return to Jamaica an emancipatory movement, one that actively resists “institutions of marriage and slavery that have traditionally favored the interests of white men” (Dominique 253). In this “return to a black Atlantic community, intending to take up the work of racial uplift” (Fielder, “*Woman*” 183), Olivia does not act sovereignly but rather engages a collective process. Her Black servant Dido first proposes the design after the discovery that Angelina Merton lives: “Oh, my dear Missee, we will go back to our own good country!—we will pray to a good God Almighty, to teach you and me to forget that we ever set foot on English land!” (*Woman*, 141). Dido and Olivia depart Great Britain after a delay, doing so only once Mrs. Milbanke formally rearticulates the plan. Olivia writes, “YES! My beloved friend, I am coming to you. I waited but for you to suggest a scheme which my heart has long anticipated. Your letter is arrived, and Dido is already packing up with avidity” (188). This return is fulfilled through correspondence uncharted by the colonial record: Jamaican female homosocial consensus.

18. Following Dido’s prayer for blotting out England, this backwards progress may not only “resist the impositions of Eurocentrism” but bracket and refuse England (Barrett-Woods 623). Thought through “the girl’s” smuggling hedgehogs into her bedroom, Dido and Olivia cast the inside out. Olivia echoes Dido in her declaration that she will “forget the lapse of time which has occurred since” her departure from Jamaica (*Woman* 188). Furthermore, the Jamaican female collective of Dido, Olivia, and Mrs. Milbanke is mirrored by the triumvirate of benevolent white patriarchs Olivia cites in bidding England farewell: “I shall carry with me over the world of waters a veneration for thy name, a

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veneration for that soil which produced a Lumley—a Bellfield—and an Augustus Merton!” (188). *Veneration* projects, perhaps ironically, a sense of distance apposite not just to Jamaica’s geographical remove from England but also to the emotional detachment present in Olivia’s transmuting these individual men into types. She performs paternal reverence while turning away from her father’s will and its “attempts to whitewash his mulatto daughter’s stigmas” (Dominique 238).

19. Simultaneously, she embraces a maternal inheritance both in her “return to a black Atlantic community” and in her intent to “take up the work of racial uplift” (Fielder, “*Woman*” 183).⁵ Olivia’s mother, Marcia, upon learning the Christian precept that her unwed sexual relationship with her enslaver Mr. Fairfield was a sin, “abjured a continuance in it” and “taught a lesson of self-denial and self-consequence” to her former sexual partner, to whom she still “confessed her love” (*Woman* 54–55). Olivia is brought similarly into disastrous imperial intimacy. She learns through, with, and from English white lies—white lies of omission in the case of Augustus Merton and of “[white] female vanity, and of disappointed [white] pride” in that of Letitia Merton (170). Olivia, in unsettling correspondence with her mother Marica, likewise magnanimously abjures.

A Strand Flexing Away from Enlightenment’s Unidirectional/Constrained History

20. Bringing *Imperial Intimacies* to *The Woman of Colour*, insisting on their correspondence across time, is “always *progressing backwards*” (Carby, “Imperial Accounting”; emphasis mine). The goal is not recovery of lost history but rather, following McKittrick’s “sharing

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of ideas (no beginnings, no ends),” other means of engaging historically (25). There is a tempered or even contradictory optimism in this/Carby’s *progressing*. It turns away from—resists if not rejects—what Justin Roberts identifies as “[t]he Enlightenment’s unbridled faith in the practical and moral utility of progress and the mutually reinforcing nature of the two” (28). The *backwards* of Carby’s locution indicates a historical turn. Bruce Buchan helps situate *progress* in relation to history as he glosses John Brewer and Silvia Sebastiani: “Enlightened philosophers expressed a ‘historical certainty’ about the past such that, reasonable conjectures as to its varying patterns coupled with logical deductions about universal human motivations could simultaneously ‘embrace every aspect of human progress...’, unlocking the future’s secrets” (411).⁶ Carby may practice progress, but her backwards movement works to exhume that which has been turned under in establishing and upholding white liberal humanism’s persistently bright horizon envisioned through the Enlightenment. Her archival work never embraces the purported neutrality of historicist methodology. Tracing the script in actual registers kept by enslavers exemplifies a gestural thinking that repudiates “the future’s secrets,” replacing them with kinesthetic knowing. Carby speaks of progress with a persistent present participle: “always progressing backwards.” This practice of presentism becomes more present, more material, in its correspondence with the past.

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21. Carby's "always progressing backwards" twists Newtonian definition of time: "Absolute, true, and mathematical time, in and of itself and of its own nature, without reference to anything external, flows uniformly and by another name is called duration" (Newton 408). With the "flow" of time ("Tempus absolutum . . . fluit"), Newton describes time as unidirectional and constant; this construction is integral to the felicitous relationship between history and the future as summarized above by Buchan. Carby, in "always progressing backwards," corresponds with Crawley's analysis—drawing on Wynter and Steven Salaita—of "being historical," which he revokes as producing "a condition of immobility" in the present, a "historical being, a sense of self, that only reiterates the western theological-philosophical sense of being" (147–49; see also Gikandi 39). Crawley turns to John S. Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy* for the possibilities of thinking time beyond Newton:
- And now, a return to ourselves.
We know where we stand in Martinique. The arrow of history dizzyingly indicated for us our human task: a society, corrupt from its origins through crime, reliant for the present on injustice and hypocrisy, fearful of its future because of its guilty conscience, must morally, historically, and inevitably disappear.
—Suzanne Césaire, "1943: Surrealism and Us" (37)

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The linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future is practically foreign to African thinking. . . . *Actual time* is therefore what is present and what is past. It moves "backward," rather than "forward"; and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly in what has taken place. (17)

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Mbiti continues (beyond Crawley's above quotation and in verbiage that parallels and perhaps overlaps with *Sankofa*), "Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth" (17).

22. I do not suggest Carby expressly invokes an African philosophy by "always progressing backwards," but I do intend that this turn moves (us) away from the fixity of linear history, a turn present in the structure of Carby's book, her spinning a web that spans rather than concludes, a web that vibrates with her own *vibrant, fleshy, chaotic, morbid* experience. I intend that Mbiti, Crawley, Carby, and Akan and Diasporan practices of *Sankofa* correspond in their emphasis on material experience of time, experience of and through but not integral to enfleshment. Enfleshment does not replace humanity, forming a new unity; it webs experiences of time through (ac)knowledging positioned yet mutable relationalities. It creates correspondence.

A Strain on Errant Methodology which Contradicts the Essay's Previous Interpretations of *The Woman of Colour*

23. As a graduate student, I was carefully disciplined that effective scholarship eschews error, pushing always toward correctness and coherence of knowing. To proceed otherwise, a mentor advised me, was abomination. As such, writing and thinking through contradiction became abominable. To be "always progressing backwards," however, designates a certain errancy. The oppositional directions of this method, its pairing of *pro-* and *back-*, recognize

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the inevitability of conflict, contradiction. As Sinanan's essay in this roundtable remarks, *Imperial Intimacies* pursues Carby's errancy: "the girl" and her adult selves correspond through their shared positioning as her "mother's errant daughter" whose "final act of defiance . . . is to rewrite her [mother's] stories to retrieve a different kind of sense from the remains" (127). Elsewhere, Carby openly errs even against such restitution, of (re)sensing the remains. Visiting the house in Kingston, Jamaica, where her father was born, she takes a photo, included in *Imperial Intimacies*. "[G]rieving for her father," "overwhelmed by a deluge of his memories of poverty," and eager not to impose on its current residents, Carby neglects to introduce herself to the young woman who grants her permission to photograph the home: "I feel I behaved like an intrusive, imperialistic anthropologist" (36). *Imperial Intimacies* includes Carby at odds with the ethos of her project in part through the development of her project—*pro-* and *back-* conflict. In the exchange with "the young woman," she politely proprietously disappears relationality in service of the ends of her research and, in (re)turn, reconstitutes rather than absorbs the contradiction of a Black being overloaded. Enfleshment and correspondence as methods encourage explication rather than absorption of their own unruly mutability. And, so, this essay turns toward abomination—of both the novel as liberatory and imperial (in the next two sections), of its characters as both human and not-human (in the last).

24. Kristina Huang and Olivia Carpenter read Olivia's return to Jamaica not as resistance in service of Black liberation but as advancement of "a liberal imperial project" (Huang 167). Carpenter projects the future of Olivia's work in Jamaica as part of the maintenance and amelioration of slavery in the temporal context of the novel; following the abolition of the

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slave trade, the institution of slavery persists and continues to flourish through moral reform (255–56). In progressing backwards, then, “Olivia continues the legacy of her father’s failures.” Huang’s analysis encompasses the horizon of abolition: the novel forwards “a paternalistic notion of emancipation in Jamaica while remaining heavily invested in colonial governance of Black people” (Huang 167). Above, this essay reads Marcia as a figure of refusal whose education, particularly through white lies, establishes the instability and transformability of roles like “scholar” and “master” (*Woman* 54). Huang argues otherwise: “Marcia demonstrates her proficiency in European ‘enlightened values’ by challenging Mr. Fairfield on the terms of their ‘unchristian’ relationship” (174). Olivia’s maternal return functions differently as such, and Huang’s reading accords with the epilogic “Dialogue between the Editor and a Friend,” which follows Olivia’s bidding farewell to England. The editor posits two types of reader who fulfill the intent of their novel: the “*child of calamity*” and the “*skeptical European*” (*Woman* 189). The former learns Christian acceptance, to “become resigned to [their] fate.” The latter, particularly in relation to the former, looks outward from the center of empire, casting Black life at a geographical remove as “the *despised native* of Africa” towards whom the “*skeptical European*” will “look with a compassionate eye.” The editor colonizes the reading experience, insisting upon “‘the scopic regime’ of modernity” from the bounded inside of the colonial mainland. The editor reenacts Mr. Lumley’s “extravagant objectification of Olivia’s suffering,” which is to the white-English-male-spectatorial-gawking-at-Olivia’s-body-throughout-the-novel but the flip side of the same coin (Murray 97). This essay might/must similarly overturn its identification of Jamaican female homosocial consensus as impetus for return to Jamaica: the articulation moves from the mouth of Black Dido to

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biracial Olivia's mind and is sanctioned in writing by the likely white Mrs. Milbanke. It proceeds up the pitch of racist hierarchies of being, agency, and discourse. Olivia, "spun across the Atlantic," stretched between imperial intimacies on both sides, is interpretively errant (Carby, *Imperial Intimacies* 3). She figures along both lines, anticolonial and colonial. She tells both histories.

A Long Strand Opening Errant or Contradictory Methodology/Movement to Anachronism and, as such, Multiple Disunified Historical Horizons

25. If regress—backwards movement—is integral to progress, Carby's method is anachronistic. In *Novel Institutions: Anachronism, Irish Novels, and Nineteenth-Century Realism*, Mary Mullen demonstrates that fictional form operates to codify or render in institutional terms both social identity and historical experience. The ideological function of form harnesses the purportedly progressive Newtonian flow of time within what Mikhail Bakhtin terms "national-historical time" (23–25). The history of novels—by which is intended, following Mullen, the entanglement of novels' representation of history and of literary history as mediated by scholarly discipline—conventionally unfolds in "national-historical time." Both entangled strains tend to posit the nation as the ultimate limit of social meaning. As Mullen writes, "Realist novels integrate diverse characters and
- [T]he irresolute borders of assembly and disassembly that history performs suggest[] that any representation that defines itself in the terms of a pregiven developmental ontology can only do so by effacing the processual conditions, and indeed conditional context, that produce its peculiar mode of representation.
- Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human* (185)

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readers into a shared institutional temporality through their visions of the future”; they consistently flatten and resolve historical complexity by means of “institutions such as marriage or the nation-state” or, as I will suggest below, liberal humanism (5). Within realist novels, though, anachronisms, including narrative anachronies, exceed the seeming coherence and inevitability of institutional temporality: counterhistories, relational alternatives outside institutional scripting. Mullen explains, “Although realist novels aestheticize an imperialist narrative where England is both a stable site of modernity and the future that the colonial peripheries should achieve, they also represent anachronisms that explode this historical narrative in favour of a more capacious historicism” (12). Fully attentive to the force of lineal narratives, Mullen (ac)knowledges the contradictions integral to their restrictive function, contradictions that inhere in the polychronic work of history and give form to relational alternatives.

26. Carby rankles contemporary residents of Bedminster, Bristol, by negotiating the area with a 1902 map. Local good Samaritans understand the old map as misleading anachronism, whereas Carby uses it to unsettle the space as irrevocable present: “I tried to offer assurances that I was not lost” (*Imperial Intimacies* 173). *Imperial Intimacies* closes on All Saints Parish Church in Coleby as an anachronistic site of “capacious historicism” corresponding complexly, not uniformly or proprietously, with Carby’s family history. The church is the baptismal site of Lilly Carby, the enslaver and progenitor of Hazel Carby’s great, great, great grandfather Matthew. It also is a “beacon”—to her father in a World War II RAF bomber “returning over the English Channel at night”—of “home, in England” (340–42). The church realizes the threshold of “imperial intimacies” in its pooling of

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origination, omission, and recursivity. It welcomes her father through England's need of his putting his body on the line in the British war effort and through the embodied experience of safety upon return to this place from his putting his body on the line. Simultaneously, the church sites/cites and reiterates Carby familial initiation into white colonial Britishness as creation/destruction of her father's Blackness and his persistent (lineage of) exclusion.

27. Regarding *The Woman of Colour*, Parker emphasizes "the novel's formal instability" occasioned by its "pervasive editorial interruptions" that "highlight the mediating forces at work in conveying Olivia's experiences: we get her story not directly but as refracted through both editorial and technological intervention" (147). These editorial intrusions also constitute metalepses, anachronies that disrupt any teleology. In overtly mediating a unified narrative, they disrupt the order of the correspondence to disclose polychronic contingency. In the letters "purposely excluded" exist alternate versions of the novel, ones that pursue other purposes (*Woman* 100). The content of Olivia's writing likewise undermines "temporal consensus" and captures "the discordant temporalities that comprise the historical present" (Mullen 51). The grounds of the house she and Augustus rent delight Olivia because they are "quite in the *old* style (although the place be rather unjustly termed *New Park*)" (*Woman* 128). The temporal contradiction in *New Park*'s name corresponds with the novel's inversion of *mundus novus* and leads Olivia to explore historical contingencies of the place, acknowledging that the name once was apposite. First, imagining she inhabits the position of the estate's owner Mr. Seagrove, she declares, "I would not willingly lop a branch or disturb a rook's nest" (128). Understood in relation to

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the Caribbean, Olivia's impetus may support a philosophy of Indigeneity contrary to the plantation system; read from within English, her inclination here slants toward patriarchal conservatism.⁷ Within both interpretations, her verbiage marks the potential for change and, as such, raises questions of maintenance. Indeed, her thoughts then turn to historical process: "I like to walk under the shade of those trees which were planted by the hands of those who have long lain in the dust. . . . I am carried back to a remote age—I unconsciously look up to those majestic trees, which form a canopy to screen me from the fervid sun, to inquire into the manners and history of 'times, long ago'" (128). Olivia anticipates the editor's moral of Christian acceptance as she concludes her reverie with the assertion that "the human mind" remains "*always* the same, in its feelings and emotions, its pleasures, its pains" (128). Nevertheless, the text places in tension continuity and change, existential constancy and active involvement (the latter here including that of the trees, their longevity, their mediation of Olivia's experience, and their interlocution with her as she "inquire[s] into" the past through them). This passage in its focus on the estate—rented by members of the merchant class and colonial gentry—applies a broad archaism to question the relationship between contemporary England and benevolent patriarchy. Olivia conceives England as a site of honorable loss where "to form a truly unvitiated and primeval neighbourhood of undisturbed truth, simplicity, and innocence, we must revert to the golden age" (125). Lady Ingot refers to her uncle-in-law Mr. Bellfield as "that antiquity. . . . [H]e may or may not be related: but I think his head is truly *Grecian*, and if it had a genuine *rust*, it would be invaluable" (117). Her quip not only relegates Mr. Bellfield to the ancient past but objectifies him as such to repudiate his active role as benevolent patriarch who bankrolled her husband's lucrative business in Bengal. In her

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“The History of Mrs. Honeywood,” Olivia later identifies this Mr. Bellfield as “the father to the fatherless” (183). She thus encourages consideration of her relationship with him as anachronism, which in turn resonates with Fairfield’s will and its own anachronistic patriarchal history. For Lady Ingot, time operates most felicitously in the East Indies: “[I]n *India* we discriminate with great nicety on every point of sentiment and manners, and, instead of making our conversation assume the features of a Moore’s almanac, or a monthly obituary, raise the lively idea, and point the brilliant repartee!” (116). In England, she suggests, conversation is dictated by the regularity of periodical publication, specifically regarding what, or who, has passed and, in the case of Moore’s tabular “traditional and prophetic form,” an inevitable future (Anderson 101).⁸ The novel’s multiple temporalities, which importantly include disparate configurations for imperial time, destabilize “historical certainty” and “the future’s secrets,” thereby complicating any unified national-historical time (Brewer and Sebastiani 608; Buchan 411).

28. *The Woman of Colour*, riddled with anachronism and ending with Olivia’s return to Jamaica, where she will work with fellow Black life on her estate, “encourage[s] readers to imagine politics and history otherwise” because, before the editor fixes the story between two morals, it invites a sequel, projection of what is to come (Mullen 59). Elsewhere, I have suggested—building on Brigitte Fielder’s “Early Black Futures”—that Olivia acts as a “persistent participant in Black futurity,” part of a “imperative [that] connects critically with the present in which we encounter it: it enquires the extent to which Olivia’s Black futurity has been realized” (Jarvis 47). This reading treats “the hands of those who have long lain in the dust” and the trees they planted as actors who produce a history that was

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not inevitable. Carpenter and Huang develop adjacent interpretations—exemplarily theorized and evidenced arguments—to this effect by framing them in a historical contingency: for Carpenter, the novel’s institutional horizon is the persistence of slavery without the importation of enslaved people, and for Huang, it is “a liberal imperial project” that extends into the present in the “ideals and political logics that gave rise to the plantation system” and persist “in policing, the disciplinary regimentation of labour, incarceration, involuntary migration, and so on” (186). Reading the essays of Carpenter and Huang causes physical discomfort for me—wrenching my gut—because of the accuracy and facility with which they locate in the novel (which I read otherwise) a necropolitics. Mullen does not foreclose necessary readings like those of Carpenter and Huang but rather helps explain the critical and bodily tensions noted above: the politics of the realist novel “as well as its forms, are divided,” creating a dynamic that effectively if contradictorily enables readings of *The Woman of Colour*, like Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*, as simultaneously propagating and resisting the imperial project (60).

A Movement within Taxonomy, from the Ruptured Unity of the National, Historical Novel to the Mutability of Black Life as Human, Animal, Otherwise Being

29. In conveying her experiences of newlywed life in Devonshire, Olivia characterizes the Ingot family as “a new species of animal” (*Woman* 122). Julie Murray reads this to demonstrate that *The Woman of Colour* “carefully and strategically relocates questions about species distinction and the limits of the human form from the category of race to that of commerce, fashion, and commodification” (95). Murray helpfully analyzes one strain of

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the novel's tussling with taxonomy and taxonomy's transcription of hierarchies based in the Chain of Being (Jackson 48–50; Ritvo 122); however, *The Woman of Colour* and Olivia tangle with taxonomic categories in numerous ways. Before this essay fleshes those out, though, note Olivia's action in the above. She eagerly inhabits the role of naturalist, a disruption of racial and gender norms regarding the formal study of life at the end of the long eighteenth century (Kelley, "Botanical" 343–44). By the late seventeenth century, the Americas had "replaced Africa as the region of the world symbolizing an inexhaustible reservoir of life forms and natural diversity" (Giglioli 422). Olivia's discovery of new life in Devonshire, then, recapitulates the notion of England as *Mundus Novus*. Even as she inverts social norms and colonial dynamics, Olivia applies Enlightenment methods of ordering knowledge and matter through universal reason: "Naturalists in the mother country automatically claimed the right to classify the plants and animals of its growing colonial territories" (Ritvo 18). In her interpretive errancy, though, Olivia does not coalesce these Enlightenment logics. Even when she traffics in hierarchies of being, her language veers into the instability of seeming and performativity, articulating herself in uncertain terms as changeable. Of Leticia Merton, Olivia writes, "[A]ccompanied with so much self-importance, and so large a portion of conceit and affectation, with such frivolous conversation, . . . I seem hardly to consider her as a rational being; though she is wholly inoffensive to me . . . that *she* considers *me* as but *one* remove from the brute creation, is very evident" (*Woman* 73). That Leticia Merton in fact plays her racism, doing so to vengeful ends unrelated to Olivia, only intensifies the capacity for taxonomy to ensnare. Both characters perform categories of being, thereby recognizing the mutability of enfleshment. Nevertheless, Olivia and Leticia are subjected differently by/to these

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categories because of how their respective bodies seem. “[T]he scopic regime’ of modernity” as foundational to whiteness is inseparable from, if not tantamount, to “the Linnaean regime of visibility” (Kelley, *Clandestine* 5). Olivia’s awareness cannot rescue her racialized being from taxonomy and its manufacture of multifarious hierarchical entanglements. Murray’s argument pushes toward interpretive unity: her analysis works to prevent the novel from becoming “ideologically incoherent” by locating within it “a politics predicated on an *absolute* rejection of commerce and its *dehumanizing* and *deracinating* tendencies” (97, 99; my emphasis). In this analysis, both the coherence and the critique of *The Woman of Colour* rest upon liberal humanism.⁹ As Murray reads in the novel a commentary on *homo oeconomicus*, her argument works such that “we oversee (thereby failing to recognize) the culture and class-specific relativity of our present mode of being human” (Wynter 282).

30. This essay argues that Olivia and the novel challenge the naturalization of humanism whereas Murray follows principles of realism grounded in humanism, participating in the mutual reinforcement of these rationalizing and imperial principles. Elizabeth Deeds Ermath helps situate humanism in relation to realism, significant here in relation to Mullen’s discussion of the white nation-state as the horizon, the seemingly imperative site of “temporal consensus,” in literary realism (Mullen 51). Early modern European realist visual art and humanism collaborated to construct one another partly through their finding “in difference an imperative to harmonize, to rationalize, to coordinate, and in so doing rise to a higher level of generalization” (Ermath 32). The resultant “uniform horizon” comes to “reflect a redefinition of human power to understand reality” (36). Realizing Black

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humanity through the demotion of *homo oeconomicus*, as Murray does, constitutes one of the “arbitrary inversions of anthropocentric hierarchy . . . essential to the renewal and adaptability of liberal humanism’s biopolitical logic” (Jackson 77). That logic relies on the “plasticity” of Black being: according to Jackson, “black(ened) people are not so much as dehumanized as nonhumans or cast as liminal humans nor . . . framed as animal-like or machine-like but are cast as sub, supra, and human *simultaneously*” (35). White humanism and white realism stabilize themselves through the problem or uncertainty of Black humanity. With the same disastrous unevenness through which Olivia and Leticia are subjected to Linnean categories, Hazel Carby’s mother places on “the girl” the imperative to uphold human/animal distinction, her body the threshold burdened with division of inside and out: “Box and hedgehog were swept up in a flurry of disgust and deposited outside the back door, while the girl was deposited in the bath for a thorough cleansing” (*Imperial Intimacies* 338). The capacity for recent analyses of the novel to move Olivia between the poles of colonizer and liberator may not constitute an instance of this plasticity, but this essay posits this moveability as at least enabled by it.

31. Alongside the terms of the human, the novel incorporates a discourse of living creation that complicates though never eliminates animal/human distinctions and related hierarchies of being. In her initial letter, writing of enslaved Black life, Olivia refers to “the wretched state of degradation to which my unhappy fellow-creatures are sunk in the western hemisphere” (*Woman* 53). The phrasing denotes her
- I told them that I dearly wanted to map the importance of the insects and bugs mentioned in the Bible to the spiritual well-being of humankind and the Earth on which we all, man and nature, coexist. All of God’s universe.
- Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (198–99)

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correspondence—equivalency and connection—with these “creatures,” marking difference in state, not type or form, of being (53). Language of living creation is by no means unusual in the period, but its occurrence is noteworthy in the novel, where it not only appears more frequently than verbal variations of *human* but also is used by almost all main characters: it is spoken by Dido (“the dear little creatures of her own colour” [99]) and written in the letters of Leticia (“this *outlandish* creature” [101; my emphasis]) and Augustus (“a heart teeming with benevolence and mercy towards every living creature!” [103]).¹⁰ The example of “brute creation” quoted above (73) and Letitia’s employment of “creature” to demean Olivia demonstrate that the category of living creation is not impervious to hierarchization. But the capaciousness of the category, its capacity to enfold all Godly creation, perhaps beyond the living to all matter, posits existence as generative and transformative; it enables equivalencies that acknowledge material “plasticity” if not “the rupture of ‘the human’” through which Jackson conceives an epistemological transformation in the being of Blackness (20, 28, 69). Importantly, Jackson (ac)knowledges such “plasticity” as both problematic—the condition of Black life’s creation/destruction—and potentially liberatory in its opening possibilities to reveal and circumvent the traps of Enlightenment’s imperial contradictions.

32. Young George Merton learns about racism not by recognizing Black humanity but through tracing correspondence between enslavement and animal being: “But what *right* have their naughty masters got to make them slave like horses? For I’m *sure* they can’t like it—I shouldn’t like to work like mamma’s coach-horses, and stand shivering for hours in the wet and cold, as they do” (*Woman* 80). Aware that his body could and would shiver if so

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subjected, George thinks through not against his affection for horses and his keen attention to their enfleshment to reframe his understanding of Blackness. Animal affections, here, form a site of disorder or the edge of unruliness—correspondence beyond propriety. Young George is chided by his grandfather for the class-based unseemliness, degrading himself by interaction with servants who teach him that “black slaves are not better than horses over here.” Hierarchies of being necessitate patrol against contamination: “Iris screamed ‘fleas!’” (Carby, *Imperial* 338). George responds by marking affective kinship with his grandfather, their sharing what might be considered “humane” concern for horse life: “I only went to ask about your black mare, sir, . . . you know you told me yourself that she was lame!” (*Woman* 80). The crossings of young George’s confusion-as-anti-racist-learning resonate with the shared Blackness of Dido, Olivia, and the beloved mare: affection for the Black mare arguably serves as an existing channel through which George (re)processes his apprehension of Dido’s dirtiness and his relation with her. Jackson asks, “[W]hat if the very notion of a sovereign, integral, self-possessed body is intrinsic to the production of the slave’s existence as its privileged obverse?” (194). Referring to the color of Olivia’s and Dido’s skin, George asks, “And won’t *yours* and *hers* rub off?” (*Woman* 79). In this space, Olivia offers up her flesh for George to scrub: “‘Try,’ said I, giving him the corner of my handkerchief; and to work the little fellow went with all his might.” The productive contradictions of this scene flout the ways in which humanism maintains and contains the self-possessed singularity of George, Olivia, and Dido. Self-possessed singularity seeks to preclude their correspondence as “denoting connection, interplay, and communication in place of and against the normativity that legislates intersubjectivity in the Hegelian terms of the Self-Other relation” (Jackson 73–74).

33. To be “progressing always backwards” involves moving down the Chain of Being and, even more so, thinking through, rather than against, the sliding of taxonomy’s “*continuous scale*” (Jackson 49). Naturalist Olivia’s discovering in the Ingots a “new species” sits alongside a scene in which Charles Honeywood shifts Olivia among taxonomic kingdoms, from animal to plant. En route to England, he foretells her life there: “[I]f I do not mistake *your* disposition, the sensitive plant will then recoil, and never expand itself again, till drawn out by an assimilating look, or spark of sentiment!” (*Woman* 65). This recategorization at once exalts Olivia’s feeling (*supra*) and reduces her rank of being (*sub*). Honeywood identifies Olivia as *mimosa pudica*, also referred to as touch-me-not and shameplant, a species of Romantic fascination.¹¹ Its leaves fold inward at night, evoking sleep, and are sensitive to touch, closing or withdrawing quickly when touched. *Pudica* translates as “chaste” and relates linguistically to *pundendum* or external genitalia. In the period, *mimosa pudica* was conceived as “a plant which is disturbingly alive, which pretends to be an animal (being a ‘mime’ if not a ‘buffoon’ in its empathetic attempts), and which displays reactions witnessing virtuous or unbecoming motions, feelings of modesty or shameless responses . . . connected from the outset to erotic and sexual appetites” (Gigliani 435). The plant, now known as a “native of the American tropics,” was thought in the long eighteenth century to be “present in many parts of the world” (421–22). Erasmus Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden* thus orientalizes the sensitive plant: “Slow to the mosque she moves . . . ,” the “Queen of the bright seraglio . . . / So sinks or rises with the changeful hour / The liquid silver in its glassy tower” (33). Honeywood’s line, in this context, may reveal more libidinous interest in and cheeky treatment of Olivia than acknowledged by

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characterization of him as “benign white Creole” (Dominique 253). This behavior resonates with Honeywood’s incredulity late in the novel when he presses Olivia to accept his marriage proposal using terms of colonial control: ““And do you try to conquer this imperious passion?’ asked he,” with Olivia responding, ““Assuredly I do”” (*Woman* 163). In the early shipboard scene with Honeywell, Olivia, “affecting to trifle,” responds playfully yet ambivalently, ““Am I then so *very* fastidious a being Mr. Honeywood?”” (65). *Fastidious* retains in the eighteenth century a now obsolete meaning of *distasteful* or *disgusting*, in addition to its denoting here meticulous sensibility. Honeywood’s “imperious passion” demonstrates how a Johnsonian conception of correspondence that “built propriety and proportion,” through the seeming uplift of celebrating Olivia’s sensibility, overlays a correspondence of coercive subjugation, through the demotion and objectification of Olivia (Manning 14). Honoring “responsibility for the other” readily can formalize domination always in line with Enlightenment imperial contradiction.

34. In *Clandestine Marriage*, Theresa Kelley argues, “Because plants seemed to be restlessly situated between inanimate and animate kingdoms of nature, their categorial fluidity troubled efforts to keep human and animal species distinct within the animal category, as well as efforts to make distinctions among the human races that would have relegated nonwhite races to animal or lower human species,” and species such as *mimosa pudica* were particularly influential in the disruption of taxonomic unity (11, 34). Even in moving beyond the human/animal division, the novel reverts back to it, the ambiguity of Black life. Olivia as sensitive plant not only enacts the capacity for taxonomic shift but is figured as that very instability, of being “suspended between activity and passivity,” between

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subject/free and object/enslaved, with the latter necessarily overlapping objectifications of sexualization and chattel (Mitchell 198).¹² The novel engages the interplay and mutability of being, working through rather than against the correspondence between Olivia and *mimosa pudica*.

35. Olivia's ambivalent response to Honeywood's figuration of her as "sensitive plant" anticipates her correspondence with plant life elsewhere in the novel. Above, I remark her interlocution with the trees of New Park: "I unconsciously look up to those majestic trees... to inquire into the manners and history of 'times, long ago' [and infer] the human mind... always the same" (*Woman* 128). The novel takes up this communication again following the storm, which reveals Angelina, clandestine wife to George Merton prior to his marrying Olivia, remains alive:

The park was damp, the branches of the trees lay on the ground; it seemed as if even the inanimate objects had felt the recent shock which had shattered my nerves, and were mourning the wreck of happiness: the wild thought was soothing to my soul, yet I felt that my recent convalescence prevented my walking with my usual step—now firm, now unsteady and feeble. (151)

36. Olivia perceives the "chaotic, morbid materiality" of these broken trees feeling for and (re)figuring her in and as their vitality becomes inanimate. Even if she merely sees her being in and through the trees, this return crosses
- What is the Martinican?
-A plant-human.
—Suzanne Césaire, "The Malaise of a Civilization" (30)¹³

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taxonomic kingdoms with an emphasis on the dissolution of ordered being, on the plant's transformation into object matter. The scene partly—and soothingly for Olivia—marks correspondent connection between her being and the environment of which she is a part. But she also loses her “usual step” in her emergence, moving anew without steadiness. The trees-no-longer-trees reprise Olivia's figuration as sensitive plant or matter's instability. In so doing, they respond to Olivia's desire not to “willingly lop a branch or disturb a rook's nest” (*Woman* 128). The trees, having once contributed to her understanding “the human mind” as “*always* the same,” now encourage the rupture of this sameness and embody instability or multiple correspondences. Olivia, in her subsequent progressing backwards, leaves the unity of white human life in England.

A Strand Opening to Correspondence through Carby's Methodology in *Imperial Intimacies*

37. In the final chapter of *Imperial Intimacies*, the *trappings* of “the girl's” desired possession of hedgehogs are replaced with bionetworking that imagines beyond Enlightenment's white lines. Just pages prior to her discovery of hedgehogs at her father's care home, Carby encounters grave markers in the Coleby churchyard, and in the face of their weathered illegibility reads the lichen that has colonized the stones:

Thinking about lichen is liberating as well as instructive in a world in which taxonomies, genealogies and the singularity of lineages, ancestry and origins dominate, circumscribe and limit definitions of humanity. Lichen contain ecosystems, as do humans—we are “interconnected, interdependent multitudes.” (325)¹⁴

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Both *Imperial Intimacies* and *The Woman of Colour* end casting outward-also-inward for reform. These impulses are not idealized as both works thoroughly spin the contradictory impracticality of such movement in the context of ongoing Enlightenment (post)colonialism: it is never accomplished but rather for now to be “always progressing backwards.” *The Woman of Colour* corresponds to other works Jackson theorizes because it too is “generative because [it is] unruly” (Jackson 4). Recrossing the bounding horizon of realism, history, and humanism (their unity), it corresponds too with Carby’s, plus those of Suzanne Césaire, Shani Mootoo, and additional counter-legacies of *vibrant, fleshy, chaotic, morbid* Black life.

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Notes

¹ I understand this as or as akin to *enfleshment*, what Ashon Crawley carries forward with Shawn Copeland's term from *Enfleshing Freedom* (Crawley 6) and to the "materialization of the organismic body," which Zakiyyah Iman Jackson builds through and with Hortense Spillers (194). Crawley is especially noteworthy within my discussion in the possibility *Blackpentecostal Breath* realizes for Black Christianity through enfleshment, across time, and against Enlightenment, creating space for resistance within Marcia's and Olivia Fairfield's Christianity, which also functions as imperial constraint.

² Working on this strand, I was struck by the following: "A disadvantage of pull quotes as a design element is that they can disrupt the reading process of readers invested in reading the text sequentially by drawing attention to ghost fragments out of context" ("Pull Quote"). Wynter opens each section of "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" with "ghost fragments out of context," a series of substantive guide quotes that the essay refers to and works through in developing its argument. I understand this compositional method as another formal version of correspondence. Sequential reading of her essay allows each quotation to signify in isolation as "ghost fragments" and to resonate with surrounding guide quotes, challenging a reader to assemble meaning from them as an echo of the work Wynter herself did in developing the essay. When Wynter's essay refers to the quotations, they often remain entirely exterior to her prose, complicating a unidirectional forward current within the text and emphasizing intertextual intersubjectivity rather than managing to disappear it. Neither is this compositional method unique to Wynter—others like Jacques Derrida employ it—nor does my analysis rely on any assertion of Wynter as singular. Notably, her methods elsewhere bolster my claim. McKittrick, in her prefatory

remarks upon her published conversation(s) with Wynter, explains, “The conversations are divided into sections that the reader can study in order, out of order, separately, or all together” (Wynter and McKittrick 12). These conversations likewise include guide quotes, the content of which McKittrick and Wynter’s exchanges draw upon, doing so even more lightly and elliptically than the method of “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom.” Walter D. Mignolo characterizes Wynter’s published corpus in terms similar to McKittrick’s above: “Wynter’s long, well-research, and highly insightful articles form a network, wherein her ideas and writings are in conversation with and refer back (and forth) to one another. You can enter the network through engaging with any of her articles and essays” (111).

³ Gikandi here quotes Metz (61).

⁴ Barnett-Woods identifies in *The Woman of Colour* as well as *The Female American* a “cycle of departure and return” (622).

⁵ See Fielder’s “Early Black Futures” on the significance of “uplift”: “Black struggles for emancipation were also rooted in an understanding that emancipation itself would be insufficient. Hence, prominent Black antislavery advocates promoted emancipation alongside various forms of uplift, as can be seen in efforts for education, suffrage, desegregation, reparations, and women’s rights” (237).

⁶ Buchan here quotes Brewer and Sebastiani (608).

⁷ Thank you to Kerry Sinanan, whose comments on Olivia’s language here led me to read it from both Caribbean and English positionings.

⁸ The specific almanac Lady Ingot has in mind with “Moore’s almanac” is difficult to identify as several periodicals capitalized on this title (Anderson 101; Bowen 30). I think it fair to consider all of these within Anderson’s characterization of Francis Moore’s *Vox Stellarum*: “astrological,

crude, and immensely profitable” well into the nineteenth century (99). Keith Thomas reports, “At the beginning of the sixteenth century astrological doctrines were part of the educated man’s picture of the universe and its workings,” and by the end of the seventeenth century—despite the popularity of *Vox Stellarum* among other similar almanacs—astrology “had ceased, in all but the most unsophisticated circles, to be regarded as either a science or a crime: it had become simply a joke” (285, 356). The word *almanac* likely “derived from the Arabic ‘Al Manach,’ which may be freely translated as ‘The Diary’—‘Manach’ means to count,” but this was not new to England in 1808 as “[t]he word was originally applied by Friar Roger Bacon in 1267” (Bowen 26). Although astrological “hieroglyphics” of *Vox Stellarum* frequently depict people in Asiatic clothes and architecture, the publication’s content is specific to England and its situation with regard to the stars. Thomas notes earlier instances of “specific almanacs being published for particular towns, even relatively small ones like Aylesbury or Saffron Walden” (294). For Lady Ingot, “Moore’s almanac” cannot represent that which she values: novelty, sophistication, or Orientalist exoticism. Obituaries first appeared in England in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth century, they became a facet of many monthly publications like *The Gentleman’s Magazine*. Lorna Clymer writes that obituaries throughout the eighteenth century “reveal how information about individuals could be reported without dislodging the prominence traditionally assigned to general concerns. . . . [T]here was no disjunction between a commemoration of an individual and a didactic lesson about death in general or between what may appear to be private or public preoccupations” (294). As such, this essay reads Lady Ingot’s characterization of English time and the conversations it determines as constrained and lifeless in their preset uniformity.

⁹ Mullen’s *both/and* unmoors realism from humanism through a redefinition of it as “a contradictory dynamic rather than a stable, coherent form” (14).

¹⁰ Not investing extensively in interpretive accounting, this essay nevertheless tallies twenty-three instances of *human* in various form and twenty-eight of *creature* and related references to living creation within *The Woman of Colour*. Erasmus Darwin advances a contemporaneous theory of living creation, although this essay aligns the novel with “‘supernatural’ vitalism” and Darwin with a broader “‘cosmic’ vitalism” (Wolfe 294–97). Darwin writes, “The great CREATOR of all things has infinitely diversified the works of his hands, but has at the same time-stamped a certain similitude on the features of nature, that demonstrate to us, that the whole is one family of one parent” (*Zoonomia* 1). Darwin indeed asserts a kind of equivalency among all life, positing that “one and the same kind of living filaments is and has been the cause of all organic life” (507). He develops through this idea a “sweeping cosmic history . . . in which a universal evolution tells a profoundly coherent story” of an ontological system that “resolves into a coherent argument for progress” (Griffiths 63, 80). Alan Bewell reads in Darwin’s botanical poetry a celebration of “the metamorphosis of nature into commodities” or “an imperial nature” centered in mainland England (69). As Murray demonstrates, the *The Woman of Colour* critiques commodification in naturalist terms; however, the novel can be read in accordance with Darwin’s cosmopolitan imperialism and white universal progress. This essay suggests that the novel’s conception of living creation does not propagate coherency or stable progression but rather something more volatile, particularly regarding Black life. Were this not the case, Olivia’s correspondence with the trees of New Park should signal and secure her belonging on English soil. Importantly, Darwin’s theories cannot accurately represent the various and burgeoning conceptions of life in the period. Rather, this essay intends its quick treatment to verify its discussion in both their similarities (plausibility) and differences (plausible disputation) with *The Woman of Colour*.

¹¹ According to Theresa Kelley, Erasmus Darwin’s botanical poetry “did so much to advance” the sensitive plant’s “popularity” (*Clandestine* 83). The plant likewise takes center stage in Percy Shelley’s 1820 “The Sensitive Plant.”

¹² See Sinanan’s point in her essay in this cluster that Olivia is vulnerable to enslavement upon return to Jamaica.

¹³ Césaire parrots Frobenius to enliven his categories in a Caribbean context; she “moves beyond this ethnographic description . . . to analyze the ways in which repression and exclusion by colonizers have created in the colonized a desire to assimilate to the Western model, to equate assimilation—which had been historically withheld from them—with liberation” (Rabbitt 543).

¹⁴ Carby here quotes the cover flap of Yong.