



Romanticism on the Net

Reading for Race and Romance in *Imperial Intimacies* and *The Woman of Colour*

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Abstract

Reading *The Woman of Colour* in conjunction with Hazel Carby's *Imperial Intimacies* exposes the racialised and exclusionary logic of the romance genre. Both works provide ramifying instances of the ways in which romance tropes, plot conventions, and sentimentalist gloss falter when brought to bear on racialised subjects. Following the insights of Margo Hendricks's *Race and Romance: Coloring the Past* (2022), the article shows how the failures of romance conventions allow us to glimpse the "fictions of racial logic" (Carby 61) underpinning the ostensibly universalist pleasures of the romance plot. Carby's critical fabulation is an invaluable supplement to the novel, catalysing its critical insights. *Imperial Intimacies* adds historical and theoretical context that resonates with the Romantic-era novel, prompting us to think about the recuperative possibilities of storytelling as well as the necessary limits on the works of the imagination. Both are "tales": open-ended works that flaunt their lacunae to better evoke the fractured worlds they represent. Reading Carby's contemporary work allows readers to better grasp the paradoxes of imperialist desire and the ways in which coercive power structures both conjure and abort *The Woman of Colour*'s romance narrative.

Biographical Note

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1. To read Hazel Carby's *Imperial Intimacies* is to be caught in the sea sway of transatlantic history: its drift and undertow, its queasy compulsions, hallmarks of uncertain crossings and fraught transits. It produces—and is a product of—profound "analytic unease" (Stoler ix): critical methodologies and reading practices set adrift from anchoring certainties and consoling taxonomies. Historically meticulous, and emotionally unstinting, it is at once a

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scrupulous delineation of Britain's hostile racial policies from World War II to the Windrush generation and a memoir mapping the "geographies of pain" (Carby 4) formed from the imperial encounter. This is no less than a genealogy of Brexit Britain: a failed state self-soothing with imperialist nostalgia, while it exports asylum seekers like refuse to Rwanda. Carby links the state-sanctioned marginalisation and export of "Brown Babies" to her own ostracism and sexual assault—a first-person account held at a distance to enable "the girl" she was to "withdraw into interior spaces where some sort of I survived, and became self-sustaining" (58). Transcending personal history, Carby splices a vivid historical novel of plantation brutality into a *longue durée* account of the psychotic calculus of empire. For Carby, "empire *is* accounting" (260; my emphasis): the enlightenment art of turning people into numbers, into inventories, into pure abstraction. She shows how accounting maintained the fiction of empire by converting "the politics of its libidinal economy" into ruthless efficiency, the pure profit and loss of fungible commodities (267). *Imperial Intimacies* seeks to reverse that sublimation: to reveal the human cost of inhuman calculus. Its foundational heartbreak is the marriage of Carby's parents, Iris and Carl. But the hurt and harms of their marriage are revealed not simply as a personal tragedy but the inevitable side effects of a culture that produced, and then punished, sexual desire as part of its processes of racialisation.

2. Carby's anguished dignity resonates with the dual heritage protagonist of *The Woman of Colour*: a novel most likely written by a white woman in Regency England. Both protagonists are historians of the heart, whose writing brokers a reckoning with the intimacies of empire. Both works use the ghost-structure of romance to imagine "what

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could have been” (Lowe 40) in their painful personal narratives. Once she was married, “romance eluded Iris on every front. Disappointment replaced possibility and eventually became despair. . . . To be a child of empire was being a spectator as her parents’ marriage was destroyed by the stomach-churning, acidic tides of racism” (Carby 112). Carby’s critical distance and imaginative insight is inaugurated by disenchantment. Like Saidiya Hartman’s “recombinant narrative,” *Imperial Intimacies* “weaves present, past, and future in retelling the girl’s story and in narrating the time of slavery as our present” (Hartman 12). These stories beyond the (temporal and spatial) parameters of domestic fiction unsettle or sheer away from plots of white liberal fulfilment. But their failures and heartaches are shadowed by spectral plots of happy marriages, domestic bliss, and familial harmony. Scuppering the generic constraints of romance and returning to displaced or buried histories, both works thus deal in a “past conditional temporality,” creating a “space of productive attention to the scene of loss,” which provokes “a different kind of thinking” (Lowe 40) about the plots of belonging, fulfilment, and love. “What might have been” haunts these narratives. By focussing on romantic disappointment and the painful foreclosure of love, both texts make visible the ways in which the libidinal economy of empire depends on a white romantic fantasy that conjures the universal pleasures of love while excluding colonised subjects from that schema.

3. *Romance* is a notoriously slippery term. For Northrop Frye, it is a “generic plot” (162) that expresses a dream of wish fulfilment (186). Romance structures the self-realisation of the hero as he struggles with death and danger before being united with his beloved. While “concepts such as salvation or redemption, realism, possibility, and punishment are

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thematic hallmarks of the romance plot . . . love and a happily ever after are its generic conventions” (Hendricks 6). But this simultaneous quest and postponement of “a particular end, objective, or object” (Parker 4) creates an essentially melancholy structure premised on the difficulty, sometimes the impossibility, of reaching the dream-time of romantic gratification. Both “escapist and socially pertinent,” romance is therefore also an “oddly mixed mode . . . characterized by irony, parody, self-consciousness, and comedy—and sometimes by a sense of deep failure and loss” (Saunders, 3). But its stock-in-trade of “happily ever afters and love” has meant the genre is often exempted from “white supremacist logic” (Hendricks xiii). Margo Hendricks’s crucial *Race and Romance: Coloring the Past* shows that from the early-modern period not merely are “romance and whiteness . . . nearly synonymous in the arena of love” but that the genre demonstrates a “pervasive engagement with race-making, whether it is tied to nation, ethnicity, or colorism—and sometimes all three” (7). As a genre “organized around the historical problem of the meeting of old forms and new worlds” (Black 9), romance seems well suited to the ideological and moral problems posed by the monstrous enterprise of transatlantic slavery; a genre capable of negotiating the schism between cultural ideals and colonising practices. But in “encounters within the borders of this island nation” (Carby 65), romance plots fissure or derail, allowing us to glimpse the “fictions of racial logic” (61) underpinning the ostensibly universalist pleasures of the romance plot. These imperial encounters generated “new formulations of being and becoming a national subject relating to the ways in which people become racialized”: an “imposition of difference” (65). In both *Imperial Intimacies* and *The Woman of Colour*, marriage is not the entry point for “happily-ever-after,” which often terminates narrative, but a crisis that sets plot coordinates awry.

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The juddering aftershocks reveal the generic and historical exclusions of a romance plot circumscribed by nation, ethnicity, and colorism. Following Hendricks's insights and attending to the failure of romance in these works reveals it as a "literary genre *and* a cultural ideology . . . projected through a lens of whiteness, heterosexuality, patriarchalism, and class consciousness" (Hendricks xiv; my emphasis).

4. In the roundtable in which this cluster originated, I discussed *The Woman of Colour* as a work that suggests the longstanding racial inequalities of love, an historical foreshadowing of what Averil Y. Clarke calls "race-based romantic deprivation" (4). The novel's postscript, which is really a preface, stages a "Dialogue between the Editor and A Friend" where the editor "dismisses objections that the moral is unclear because she has not furnished her heroine with the hedonic dividends of romance" (Barr 43). This refusal to "reward" Olivia "even with the usual meed of virtue—a *husband!*" (*Woman* 189), shows that the renunciation of marriage is fundamental to the novel's crafting of what Donnette Francis calls "Caribbean women's 'antiromance'" (6). This oppositional mode enables "alternative ways of belonging to the nation by shifting the focus to the sexual complexities of dwelling at home and abroad" (6). *Imperial Intimacies* is also an antiromance. Its "reckoning of movement" (Carby 3) begins with an eroticised spatial transgression: a white woman crossing an English dancefloor to hold a Jamaican pilot close to her body, to syncopate movements, courting the gaze and potential censure of onlookers, challenging them with a display of desire. But what begins with sexuality, ends in domestic dysfunction. Carby shows marital breakdown is caused not by purely personal incompatibility but by governing "fictions of racial logic" in wartime Britain that led to

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“new formulations of being and becoming a national subject” (65). As “the only woman to ask [Carl] to dance,” Iris demonstrates a romantic self-determination through an act of defiance that flies in the face of explicit directives (71). Intruding into the page, and constraining the literal space of her story, is an extract discussing the British Home Office’s 1942 directive that British women “were advised not to consort with n—s” stationed in the country during the war. In this context, Iris’s action is not pure self-determination but a moment of profound racialisation: “To feel brave, to be proud, means that she must have considered herself white, that her whiteness had a value and she was willing to risk her worth” (71). Iris views heterosexual love as the “quintessential intimate event” in the individual life, “the favoured plot through which intimacy is written” (Povinelli 10): an expression of fleeting female autonomy. But instead of confirming the myths of romantic love and British liberalism, Iris and Carl’s relationship is “caught in the entanglement of race, its skeins threading into their actions, attitudes and beliefs” (Carby 72). Their “intimate coexistence at the centre of the empire” registers as a cultural and sexual affront, uncovering the underlying libidinal economy of empire (76).

Their duality, their coupling, did not contribute to the reproduction of white manhood, guardian and conduit of imperial, patriarchal power. . . . Imperial patriarchy was an absent presence . . . in a relationship that was an explicit challenge to the social and political relations of colonialism. The marriage of Iris and Carl in the metropole was a provocation, their domesticity conspicuous, a distasteful reminder of proscribed but commonplace interracial sex in the peripheries, sex regarded not only as evidence of colonial degeneracy, but also as a threat to the regulation and governance of empire.

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Their “half-caste” daughter was an offence . . . because she was a public statement of closeted colonial desire. (76–77)

Carby is stigmatised for her parents’ relationship and forced to endure its violent breakdown under unbearable social conditions. As she notes, this was “*not a romantic union* but a step into purgatory. . . . [B]reaking racial and sexual taboos was not a process of magnetic fusion but a violent repulsion by which they became bound in mutual emotional isolation” (113; my emphasis). Iris and Carl’s “being together jeopardized any sense of cultural belonging” (81). The marital breakdown of Iris and Carl, estranged from each other and from the world around them, attests to an intrinsic colour bar in British romantic imaginings.

5. Olivia Fairfield, like the narrator of *Imperial Intimacies*, is a reminder of “proscribed but commonplace” sexual relations countenanced in the Caribbean (*Woman* 76). The novel’s framing of the relationship between her enslaved mother, Marcia, and her white planter father, Mr. Fairfield, shows how representational strategies palliated and sentimentalised conditions of sexual servitude and rape, but also how the mediating voice of a woman of colour fissures and ironises such rhetorical cohesion. Marcia is a captive when Fairfield first encounters her:

Torn from all endearing ties of affinity and relative intercourse! . . . [W]hen exhibited on the shores of my native island, the symmetry and majesty of her form, the inflexible haughtiness of her manner, attracted the attention of Mr. Fairfield. . . . [H]is kindness,

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his familiarity, his humanity, soon gained him an interest in her grateful heart! She loved her master! (54)

Olivia's romantic framing of her parents' first encounter eroticises the violence and estrangement that is plantation society's precondition and permanent state. The stage upon which the youthful Marcia is "exhibited" and attracts Fairfield's supposedly discerning eye is a Jamaican slave auction, an occasion notorious during the period for its spectacular and dehumanising traffic. Summoning romance tropes to prettify the contemporary Caribbean invokes a disturbing historical phenomenon that troubles their timeless platitudes. Like Behn's Imoinda, Marcia exhibits a feminine vulnerability that is accompanied by markers of "majesty" and rank superiority. But the rapidity with which Fairfield's mere "humanity" purchases gratitude and "love" from this noble woman suggests her precarity. Olivia's vacillating rehearsal of white creole "sentimentalized, even formulaic language" thus actively "reveals the unsentimental actualities of daily life on the estates . . . giving the lie to claims of West Indian benevolence" (Ward 48).

6. Despite the dominance of realist authority, white creole fiction of the early nineteenth century tends to morph "into the literary genres that it eschews: sentimental fiction, gothic melodrama, and imperial romance" (Ward 18), with apologists ineluctably drawn to modes that facilitate dissembling, dramatising, and sentimentalising the realities of plantation slavery. The recapitulation of imperial fantasy by a woman of colour fractures its comforting conventions. Olivia's claim that her father "loved Marcia with fervour" (*Woman* 55) is subverted by her idolisation of her mother's virtues and her militant

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declaration that “the seducer of innocence was always guilty!” (54). Romance tropes grotesquely misrepresent abusive and exploitative relations, as white planters use sentimental gloss to repackage as pleasure what is, in fact, rape. No happy ending is possible for Marcia and Mr. Fairfield: those categorised as chattel do not qualify for romance, no matter how their masters might congratulate themselves on their refined and tragic sentiment. “Only that grave, where the captive is made free!” can extricate Marcia (55).

7. Fairfield’s refusal to marry Marcia exposes the distance between sentimental rhetoric and racial realpolitik. His behaviour implicitly endorses “white endogamy as the desired norm of white creole familial society” (Ward 90). The arranged marriage between his daughter and her white cousin, Augustus Merton, is an explicit form of “racecraft” (Fields and Fields), where the practice of racism produces the illusion of race. Fairfield claims to remove Olivia from Jamaica because her skin colour will incur racism from the planters, when in fact he is motivated by racism, by his belief in (and fear of) Olivia’s racial difference. Fairfield’s arranged marriage establishes “transatlantic threads of kinship” (Carby 315), which give his daughter literal, legal, and symbolic proximity to white prestige, but its financial terms and conditions express a racist insecurity about Olivia’s person. Fairfield thus attempts to transpose Jamaica’s “pigmentocracy” (Hall 41), where shades of skin colour undergird class structure, to Britain, underestimating the more brutal racist binaries that govern the metropole.

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8. Powerfully propulsive in both narrative and emotional terms, Olivia's arranged marriage makes clear how "the intimate couple" continues to operate in fiction as "a key transfer point between . . . liberal imaginaries of contractual economics, politics, and sociality and . . . liberal forms of power in the contemporary world" (Povinelli 16). Because Olivia is the daughter of an enslaved woman, her freedom is always imperilled by the threat of enslavement. But her decision to marry is characterized by her wants as much as her father's will. Her frank expression of her attraction not merely to Augustus's intelligence but also his person accords with romance's prioritisation of women's pleasure. Olivia considers Augustus a "model of manly beauty and grace"; his "smile sweet" and his expression "irresistibly interesting" (*Woman* 72). Duty converges with desire. But the well-meaning Augustus only consents to marriage from a combination of white guilt, financial expediency, and chivalric sense of obligation. Lacking voluntary passion, the couple are subject to a fatal asymmetry of feeling. As in Iris and Carl's marriage, mutual alienation exacerbates isolation. Despite the couple consummating their marriage, Augustus never confides in Olivia, maintaining instead a lukewarm respect and distance. She remains "not half his wife—the partner of his bed—but not of his heart" (120).

9. With the revelation of Angelina as Augustus's "lawful" wife, Olivia, already acutely aware of Britain's racialised hierarchy of feminine beauty, is conclusively racialised and separated from her beloved. Legal sanction confirms Angelina as wife and mother, rendering Olivia a "sexualized woman of empire" (Nussbaum 7) adrift in British society. Angelina's domestic legitimacy and marital happiness is predicated on Olivia's abjection. Neither wife nor virgin, in legal, social, and sexual limbo, Olivia is sentimental surplus.

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Angelina and Augustus's story—a noble and forbidden love, a clandestine marriage between an honourable man and a vulnerable young woman, a shipwreck and a scheming rival, the revelation of his cherubic infant born in wedlock—nears parody in its conformity to romance tropes, highlighting the racial parameters of the genre. Augustus's marriage not only makes Olivia's love redundant but also creates a wifely surplus in which the heroine's avowed sexuality threatens to redefine her as “the wanton polygamous Other” (Nussbaum 73). As a site for exploring the contradictory demands of “the erotic and the exotic,” polygamy reimagines “the increasing demands of colonization” through competing racialised sexual relations (Nussbaum 76). But even as the novel uses Olivia to constitute the domestic unit of the white family, it also resists and rebukes social (and narrative) presumptions of her sexual availability: she flees predatory English society for an isolated rural retreat, ultimately choosing to return to Jamaica. Sentimental and transactional, ecstatic and melancholy, Augustus and Olivia's brief union exemplifies the constitutive tensions of imperial intimacies, “proximities grounded in uneasy attachments, encumbering affections, and abrupt departures” (Stoler xii). In Olivia's agonising exclusion from the sentimental union of Augustus and Angelina, *The Woman of Colour* emphasises the ways in which white romantic conventions necessarily exclude the happiness—indeed depend upon the immiseration—of racialised others.

10. The public dissolution of Olivia's marriage shows how ruthlessly Britain's libidinal economy enforces its colour bar. Indeed, contrary to her father's deluded idealism about British fairness, Olivia finds the “prejudices of society” found in Jamaica “operate against her with tenfold vigour” in provincial England, where it is “no crime to plot against the

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happiness, to ruin the peace and character of a poor girl of colour!” (*Woman* 137). The part payoff of her dowry cannot entirely dispel the disquiet underlying the Mertons’ uneven and testy tolerance.¹ Although Olivia is ostensibly part of British society, public curiosity in “*Gusty’s Black Princess*” (86) and spiteful social slights demonstrate that even as she rhetorically affirms the magnanimity of enlightenment Englishness, her experience of “racial difference and distinctions” attests “to the violence of liberal universality” (Lowe 7). Olivia’s philosophic and urbane approach to such racist slings and arrows resonates with the civic dysphoria and humiliation experienced by Carby’s father, Carl. Both are schooled as imperial subjects in Jamaica, where British culture is percolated through enlightenment aesthetics. As Mariam Wassif has shown, “the author emphasizes Olivia Fairfield’s learnedness in the English literary tradition. Beyond knowing Milton, Cowper, and Wordsworth, Olivia pulls the threads of their writing into her experiences as a woman of color, her outsider and insider critiques of English society, and her consciousness of that society’s global reach” (48). Two of the works Olivia draws upon—Thomas Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” (*Woman* 99, 128), and Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village” (95, 99)—were included in textbooks used “to school imperial subjects all over the empire” (Carby 55) and were two of Carl Carby’s favourite poems (54–55).

11. British imperial culture, as Carby notes, makes “Englishness . . . the dominant feature of Britishness . . . [which is then] seamlessly threaded into English history through its literature” (49). Goldsmith and Gray’s literary landscape of pastoral retreat seems free from politics and bleached of particularity (any strain of Irishness in Goldsmith’s Auburn is so

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faint as to be subliminal). But when mediated by Brown subjectivities, the eighteenth-century canon's supposedly neutral aesthetics are shown to be intrinsically racialised. *The Woman of Colour* marshals English literature as consolation against a racism, which it can only ascribe to individual venality or malice, even as it turns the tools of empire against the hypocrisy of its heartland. But Carby explicitly shows that it is Britain's state structure, its very architecture of power and subjecthood, which at once promulgates personal autonomy, liberty, and dignity as benefits of empire while systematically withholding those rights from colonised subjects. *Imperial Intimacies* supplements novelistic insight—the pervasive plot of racism—with historical records of racialised discrimination: the erasure of Caribbean volunteers in World War II; the Home Office's repeated rejection of Carl's citizenship; bureaucratic policies designed to eject immigrants from the island-nation after their wartime utility had elapsed. Carby's mixed form interrupts the grand narratives of imperialist history with archival and fictional forays. As in *The Woman of Colour*, the individualist, white subjectivity presumed by the machinery of the novel is shown to be complicated: citizens of empire and denizens of fiction alike are moved by impersonal forces which unmoor their fates and feelings from the comforting emplotments of romance.

12. *Imperial Intimacies* interleaves the bureaucratic traces of individual tragedy with the stories that Carl tells Carby in the final years of his life. His is an urgent and “vivid reliving of the past through story”—memories of riots and resistance, in 1930s Jamaica, and in England from the 1960s to the 1980s (Carby 34). It is Carl's exile, sacrifice, and love that enable Carby to become “both historian and colonial subject” (31). Rather than “confirm[ing] the romance of the landscapes and beautiful bodies used to tantalize and entice tourists[,] . . .

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[h]e gave me the gift of a counter history which revealed the enormous distance and dissonance,” the “drama of contradiction” between empire and its lived realities (31). But as Carby exposes and supplements the violent falsifications of official history and the archive, she refuses to smooth these opposing shards into a coherent narrative. “Orphan threads have been left broken because I do not know how they should connect. Though I am unable to make these repairs the web weathers and holds,” she writes (4). The contrapuntal form moves between domestic space and imperial distance, allowing images and texts to displace and reshape it: sometimes creating dialogue; sometimes startling juxtapositions and paradoxes.

13. Willingness to allow brokenness, incoherence, and irresolution is crucial to both *Imperial Intimacies* and *The Woman of Colour*. The former is not a history, the latter is not a novel: both declare themselves a “tale.” Elbowed out by the novel by the mid-nineteenth century, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tale is a highly self-conscious, mixed, and belated fictional form: a “kind of romance-after-novels,” “[a] unique mix of romance and novelistic features” (Jarrells 489, 490). The tale tends toward open-endedness: its heterogeneous materials are left unsynthesized; formal and geographical limits are traversed; it claims didactic significance, oral inventiveness, aspects of the marvellous. Its generic multiplicity helps make sense of the dispersive energy that characterises these works. Tales “highlight their own gaps—indeed, the gaps of the genre itself” (Jarrells 488). *The Woman of Colour* flaunts its lacunae: the editor “makes no apology” for inserting extra letters to supplement a break in Olivia’s journal and letting “the reader a little behind the scenes” (100). Olivia brands her letters “a packet of mutilated scraps” (75): occasional, impromptu, lacking

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design, subject to the temporal delay of the packet boat and to the rupture which follows the revelation of Augustus's marriage. This hiatus is a "long, *long* chasm" signalled by two lines of asterisks that inaugurate the dismantling of the romance plot (136). In lieu of teleology, short, fragmentary, and recursive narratives proliferate, histories that predate Olivia's story. Just as Carby's "generically unruly book" is "always progressing backwards," *The Woman of Colour* also returns back to Jamaica, in its protagonist's memories and via the packet ship that carries its heroine's correspondence (Jarvis).² The Caribbean pull creates an unnerving recursiveness: more an uncanny insistence than comforting narrative teleology. While Olivia Carpenter argues that Olivia becomes "a sentimental planter . . . when she cannot become the heroine of a marriage plot," the open-endedness of the novel leaves her (and us) in suspension (256). The voice of the editor admonishes the pleasure-seeking demands of the romance reader: reasserting fictionality and didactic artifice, the Caribbean futurity summoned in the afterword is not a dream of sensual excess and colonial gratification but of women's labour toward amelioration in the aftermath of inhumanity. This is a tale that cannot be told by the novel.

14. *Imperial Intimacies*' final section, "Legacies," should be required reading for anyone reading *The Woman of Colour*. It provides an invaluable tool for understanding the novel and what it cannot write into narrative. At times, Carby appears a medium transcribing missives from a traumatised past, channelling archival knowledge through her own visceral connection to legacies of pain. Just as she recognises the bifurcation of her own lineage into the "Black" and the "white" Carbys, she understands that both are "intimately linked . . . through the imperial sexual economy," kinship made and fractured by slavery, rape,

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and racial politics (305). The stringent, meticulous, and empathetic account of the historical detail and human costs of slavery that emerges does not merely add depth to the historical fictions of *Imperial Intimacies*; it also acts as corollary of “the domestic space” of the novel, a twinning that shows how fiction “was an integral part of a colonial world of exploitation and dispossession” (258). Instead of creolising the provincial space of balls and tea parties, of regency frocks and rational heroines, the *Woman of Colour* sets beyond the plantation to force a confrontation with slavery: a topic often displaced, suppressed, sublimated or “reduced to an ‘imaginary surface’” on which white culture projects other preoccupations (Carby 258).

15. Olivia’s initial compliance with her father’s will, her deference to her white cousin and English society, also become more comprehensible when read alongside Carby’s analysis of free women of colour in Jamaica. These women, she writes, were “caught in a form of sexual servitude as a means of survival,” shoring up their precarity by optimising their proximity to white men, leading lives of “careful negotiation” (291, 294). Carby’s work gives invaluable insight into the contextual power dynamics of Olivia’s racialisation. Noting that “free people of colour collaborated with efforts to maintain white supremacy,” especially in regards the marriage market, *Imperial Intimacies* also allows us to reconsider Olivia’s apparent complicity and quiescence (293). In light of Carby’s observation that “free women of colour did not establish bonds of sisterhood with their enslaved kin” (291), Olivia’s praise of her Black mother, her professed love for Dido, and her explicit advocacy for the enslaved seem more radical. Just as *The Woman of Colour*’s failed romance pushes

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back against imperial histories by insisting on the integrity and interiority of Olivia, and her right to love, so historical context recalibrates literary interpretation.

16. Carby's critical fabulation helps us read *The Woman of Colour* more sceptically, armed with historical insight and imaginative empathy. She tracks both the economic motivations and racialisation of white planter society: her ancestor Lilly Carby's "seasoning" was a process of "his acculturation among hundreds of the enslaved," learning "to become a white man in a British colony," and realising "that as a white man he could exercise power with impunity: here he raped and punished and tormented" (279). Thickening the historical context of imperial white masculinity frames the "sentimental planter" sceptically. Fairfield's paternal care toward Olivia is unsettled by the racialised relation: is she a much-loved daughter? Or merely "the first child to be born as [his] property," (282), a chattel whose existence flatters his sense of "discernment, of good judgement," a man "who could continue to successfully breed from African captives" (284)? Carby's stringent analysis of plantation naming strategies—designed to reinforce patriarchal power, to control bodies in space, to create a comforting "colonial simulacra" of England—recasts Fairfield's parental love not as filial affection but as a symptom of a slave-owning mentality (315). While the nineteenth-century novel "domesticated the sexual economy and politics of enslavement" (267) to a certain extent, Carby represents Jamaica's violent "ecology of economic, racial, political and social entanglement" (279) in vivid and sickening detail. While the novel gestures toward the suffering of enslaved women through Marcia, whose violation is elided by her daughter's discrete mourning, *Imperial Intimacies* uses literary affordances to

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recalibrate history in its recuperation of real women, reinvesting them with humanity through imagination and storytelling.

17. In their final pages, both works invoke prelapsarian moments that turn from the tragic narratives that precede them. Olivia is poised to return “the scenes of [her] infantine happiness . . . [and her] youthful tranquillity” and the solace of the maternal Mrs. Milbanke (*Woman* 188). Carby imagines her father as she never knew him: untouched by despair, full of promise, a young fighter pilot tasked with protecting his homeland, flying through night skies above sleeping fields. Carby imagines his own dream of belonging, in the moments before landing in the country that would cause him so much pain: “[M]y father knew he was home, in England” (342). These moments are filled with loss—the anguish of what might have been otherwise. But they are also instances of the “perennially child-like quality of romance[,] . . . its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space” (Frye 186). Loosened from the certainties (and cruelties) of emplotment, these are not traditional conclusions but gestures of momentum whose deterritorialized incompleteness “provokes an experience of transhistorical reading—across different times, irresolvable into one” (Black 1). Read together, both tales reveal the inability of history and romance to tell the truth about imperial lives, but they weave those materials of failure and loss—miraculously, paradoxically—into a memory of love that becomes something like hope.

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Notes

¹ I'm grateful to Kerry Sinanan for this point.

² I'm indebted to Ereck Jarvis for this reference to Carby's 2021 Dartmouth Lecture, "Imperial Accounting."