

Abstract

DESTRUCTION OF THE CARIBBEAN LANDSCAPE THROUGH COLONIZATION
IN EDGAR MITTELHOLZER'S *CORENTYNE THUNDER*, JEAN RHYS' *WIDE SARGASSO
SEA*, AND WILSON HARRIS' *PALACE OF THE PEACOCK*

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The Caribbean Islands have long been known for their lush, tropical scenery. For this distinctive landscape to continue to be so alluring throughout the centuries, to the natives as well as to others, it must be respected, revered, and cared for in a loving manner, ensuring that generation after generation can continue to enjoy the islands' natural wonders. Much literature abounds speaking of the issues concerning the stunning landscape of these islands, which have produced an abundance of writers who have supplied readers with portraits of Caribbean society and political issues which exist therein. Three native writers have distinctively covered the Caribbean canvas with a unique representation of landscape as it relates to physical elements, environment of the savannahs and the mental components relating to the indigenous people, their heritage, and how colonialism affected them.

Ever since Columbus' voyage went awry, causing him to land on San Salvador, writers have revealed the devastation inflicted upon weaker souls who withstood the cruelties imposed

upon them for the sake of monetary gain. One such author is Edgar Mittelholzer, who penned *Corentyne Thunder*, and reveals how Columbus and those who came after him carelessly used the savannah and her people for their own purposes, illustrating how not only the land was changed, but the people and their heritage as well. Another novelist who parallels Mittelholzer's art is Jean Rhys, creating *Wide Sargasso Sea* so readers can see through the eyes of an island victim how relentless intruders were to accomplish selfish goals. Lastly, Wilson Harris, whose love of country complements Mittelholzer and Rhys, displays his unique style in *Palace of the Peacock*, allowing readers to enter the minds of those who conquered the lands for selfish gain, to show that sometimes the conqueror realizes the devastation inflicted upon his victims and their homeland. These three writers used the lives of natives from the Caribbean Islands to illustrate how the devastating effects of colonialism changed people and their lands forever and these literary artists did this in quite a unique manner which greatly adds to scholarship.

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by
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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: GREED CAN KILL.....	8
CHAPTER 3: A VOICE CRIES OUT	18
CHAPTER 4: MIRROR TO THE SOUL.....	27
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	39

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Kenneth Ramchand alleges that “[i]n the free-for-all that followed Columbus’ accidental entry to the New World, the Caribbean area was carved up and shared out, and then shared over and over again by the European powers” (95). Ramchand’s statement is a bold one, possibly suggesting that this conquest became a struggle between forces, with the strong overpowering the weak. The Amerindians and the West Africans, along with the Caribbean lands were forced into slavery, thus losing their identity and their heritage. The trio of authors and their works discussed within this study, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *Corentyne Thunder* by Edgar Mittelholzer, and *The Palace of the Peacock* by Wilson Harris, all possess a myriad of cultures that make up their heritage, an effect caused by outsiders co-mingling with natives. This is a direct result of the strong conquering the weak, not taking into consideration the native peoples, their cultures, nor their natural habitat. As new cultures emerged, the love of country began to die out as the loyalty of the newer mixed generations was not as strong as before. Upon that basis lie the overtones which will be explored to reveal how literature, and specifically the aforementioned novels, graphically illustrates that the influx of foreigners not only changed the direction of the family tree, but also devastated the landscape upon which they conquered and claimed for their own objectives.

Caribbean landscape degradation had its beginnings with modern slavery, which, according to Iza Malowist, began in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean culture (qtd. in Patterson 407). There are many essays, articles, and books discussing the political and literary aspects of Caribbean slavery, but the options begin to decline in the area of how this beautiful, tropical, physical landscape was raped because of greed and power. Many are the benefits of studying the natural environment, the cause and effect of mistreating it, and learning how

literature reflects this devastation. Contributors to the “Forum on Literatures of the Environment,” published by Modern Language Association, inform us that “[s]tudyi ng diverse interactions with the natural world can expand cross-cultural understandings enormously” (1090).

The study of specific literature can open one’s eyes to aid in understanding the particular aspects of Caribbean history regarding landscape devastation. Patrick Taylor of York University communicates to us that, according to the political activist Frantz Fanon, “literature is important in the realization of new historical possibilities in colonial and postcolonial situations” (qtd. in Taylor). This is very true; literature does have a voice which can be heard by millions of people, just like the other avenues of influence such as newspapers and magazines. Because of this fact, it has been imperative that those who feel very strongly about the travesties which occurred in the Caribbean islands and who were personally affected by colonization, must speak out to let the world become aware of what has happened throughout history so as to warn other nations to keep their eyes and ears open in order to prevent the same kinds of colonialism from taking place in their lands as well. Seodial Deena makes the statement that “one of the central questions facing post-colonial writers is how they confront their past of slavery, indentureship, war, loss, and colonial exploitation” (50). The various types of literature explored in this paper provide valuable illustrations as to how some of these postcolonial writers addressed the devastation to their peoples and their homelands. I will attempt to paint a picture describing the dramatic alteration of the Caribbean landscape, as seen through the eyes of a young innocent girl who blossoms into the flower of adulthood, only to be disillusioned to the point of going insane, due to the inability to assimilate to the colonizing culture of the invading Europeans. The Corentyne savannah will be examined, showing that it is alive and speaking out against the travesties done to it. Lastly, the heart of the tropical rain forests of Guyana with its reflective

waterfalls will be scrutinized so as to look through the windows of the very souls belonging to those who sought only to satisfy their own personal desires with no thought toward those they were hurting.

According to Pedro Ferbel, approximately six thousand years ago, migrants came from Central America and became the first inhabitants of the Caribbean Islands. Roughly four thousand years later, other immigrants came to the islands from South America. There was “great social and political cohesion” as well as “much cultural diversity” among the peoples of these islands; there also “existed extensive trade networks, astronomical knowledge, sea travel, spiritual traditions, and a high level of artistic and craft achievement” (816). This civilization, this culture, was not only surviving, it was thriving, and doing a very good job at creating an inimitable culture. Unfortunately, this indigenous civilization and their blooming culture are often eclipsed by their well-known “tragedy of being the first Native Americans to suffer the effects of European colonization” (816). Ferbel goes on to comment that since these were the first peoples discovered by Christopher Columbus, their place in history falls to being termed “the first victims of Spanish genocide in the New World” (816). The facts are that the natives of these Caribbean Islands were practically annihilated and their cultures are very extinct, “many individuals and groups with indigenous Caribbean ancestry are today challenging colonial history and are reclaiming their indigenous identity” (816-817).

Daniel Faber, in his discussion concerning the ecological crisis occurring throughout Central America during the colonial period and the resulting consequences, states that “over 10,000 farms and some 1,004,796 acres of cotton fields” were fashioned from the “ancient tropical forests” (4), leaving the land and its peoples devastated. He also states that “[p]ristine forest lands, unique wildlife habitats, and peasant communities alike were cleared to make way

for vast *latifundios* [land masses] devoted to the production of traditional and nontraditional export crops” (3).

The following quote from Faber is quite astounding and heart-wrenching as well; he gives a clear account of the havoc wreaked upon the Caribbean landscape. The strong-willed foreigners not only took away the freedom and livelihood of the natives, but also destroyed the homelands of many flora and fauna:

Virtually all of the coastal humid hardwood forests were destroyed, including stands of old-growth ebony, cedar, mahogany, and granadilla. Coastal savannas, evergreen forests, and large areas of coastal mangroves were also cleared. With their habitats destroyed, many species of animals, including howler monkeys, anteaters, and white-lipped peccaries, were widely eliminated. Numerous other mammals of the lowland deciduous forest were exterminated or greatly reduced.

(4)

The clearing of forests was viewed as a legitimate way for the wealthier (and stronger) speculators to apportion the land for manufacture, without regard to the “soil quality and other physical characteristics” (Millikan 10). This resulted in the rich landowners utilizing the terrain for profit, while the peasants/slaves were left with land choices consisting of poor soil quality for crops and meager “topographic and hydro-graphic characteristics” for sustenance (10).

According to Kal i m Siddiqui, an Indian British writer, the landscape of the Caribbean has changed as such that the “ecological conditions needed just for survival have been destroyed” (A-128), and he “suggests that outsiders are responsible for the “intensive exploitation of natural resources for foreign exchange and short-term profit rather than for sustainable use” (Abstract). The deforestation is so bad in El Salvador and Guatemala that “it [has] resulted in massive displacement of peasants and hastened environmental decline” and this is due to “the centuries

old features of foreign domination, repression, poverty, peasant displacement and export of natural resources” (A-128).

Experts estimate that “[m]ore than two-thirds of the original tropical rainforests have been destroyed, and “that only 7 per cent of the country is covered with tracts of woodland large enough to be considered forests.” If this destruction rate continues, what *is* remaining of the forests will be completely dissipated within 20 years (A-1 28). Soil erosion, damaged farmlands, and major watershed destruction have escalated to the point of excessive flooding and draught within these regions, devastating the landscape in a terrible way (A-128).

Siddiqui attests that the initial stages of this environmental crisis began hundreds of years ago when Spain came into the region for the purpose of colonization at the beginning of 16th century; characteristics of this period include “the enslaving of indigenous labour to gold and silver mines, the introduction of cash crops like cacao, coffee and sugar and the killing of over 10 million indigenous people by 1650” (A-1 28). This is one article which supports the point that enslavement for monetary gain led to devastation throughout the Caribbean Islands.

When Christopher Columbus accidentally discovered the Caribbean Islands while seeking a westward path from Europe to Asia, little did he realize he would be unleashing the contents of a Pandora’s Box. When he traveled back to Spain with the fortuitous news of the riches these beautiful islands possessed, treasures such as gold, a warm, temperate climate, and the rich fertile soil, he became the unsuspecting instigator of a great devastation within the landscape which would last for centuries. When the Europeans realized how fortuitous the Caribbean Islands could be, they became a “vision . . . of Western desire” (Phillips 114).

Kamau Brathwaite, renowned author from Barbados, illustrates this point very poignantly in his poetry collection, *Middle Passages*. In the poem entitled “Columbe,” his description of Columbus’ discovery of a new world aptly portrays the angst felt by the natives, whether they be

Caribbean or African. Columbus dreamed that his discovery would soar him to new heights and dreams, “[b]ut did his vision / fashion as he watched the shore / the slaughter that his soldiers / furthered here?” (10).

While Columbus closed the gap between Europe and the Caribbean Islands, allowing for communication and trade relationships, he also opened the door for marauders and those seeking conquest. First the Portuguese and Spaniards, then the British, French, and Dutch began to infiltrate the islands in an attempt to overrun the land and take over, but the Europeans could not take the equatorial heat, so they abused the natives and used them for hard labor. Alan Karras notes that this marked the beginnings of colonialism.

Eventually the natives, consisting mainly of the Caribs, Arawaks, Tainos, Lucayans and all other tribes of mixed Arawak descent, began to die out because of abuse and due to the fact that their immune system could not deal with the diseases brought over by those holding them in bondage, primarily Spaniards and British. So, these Europeans decided to victimize those weaker than them and invaded Africa with the intent to bring back more natives for the purpose of enslavement. This marked “the starting point for about half of all trans-Atlantic slaving voyages” (The Transatlantic).

The downward spiral of landscape destruction in the Caribbean Islands originated with the Portuguese. With the thought of gold and other treasures consuming their minds, the Portuguese conquered the natives in this quest. The Spaniards saw what was happening and wanted their piece of the pie, so the conquistadors raided the Portuguese ships (The Transatlantic), leading to enslavement and land destruction, ultimately changing the Caribbean history of those who are joined to it forever.

The question which remains to be answered is, how does literature illustrate the colonial devastation wrought by these invaders who gave no thought to this Caribbean landscape and its

native peoples, but violated the land and the people for their own purposes? Using specific texts, I will argue that the British, along with other Europeans, ravaged the Caribbean landscape, not caring at all that they were desecrating the land and possibly making it utterly useless for future generations. Their only thought was the potential for huge profits which could be made, with utter disregard for Mother Nature or the native inhabitants, thus changing the climate and culture of the landscape forever.

CHAPTER 2: GREED CAN KILL

We are all connected to nature; the sights and sounds of our surroundings become familiar to us and a natural balance occurs. We take care of the environment by respecting it, not harvesting it until it can produce no longer; and in turn, the land welcomes us and brings forth bounty. When outsiders come in and abuse the land, destroy the timber without replenishment, there is disharmony and the land cries out, along with the native people. Edgar M ittelholzer was a native who felt this way too; the passion he felt for and the insight he possessed of his homeland in Guyana is evident in *Corentyne Thunder*, written in 1938. He had the ability to look around at his physical environment and see what so many outsiders could not, that the landscape was alive and had a personality all its own. When Ramgolal I, a lowly cow-minder who lived on the Corentyne coast, looks out into the pre-dawn sky, he hears as well as sees, the savannah, for it “remained still and grey-green, quiet and immobile in its philosophy” (M ittelholzer 23). This appreciation, as seen through the eyes of Ramgolal I and his family, depicts how the typical native Caribbean felt toward this special place before the European colonists came over and took control.

The Corentyne savannah was a special place in the Caribbean, where “the wind trailed over the savannah like cool threads of silk, and the stars winked and wheeled in a pageant of slow fireworks . . . and . . . winked again, . . . as though a wizard had changed them from fireworks sparks into serene fireflies trapped in the huge web of a celestial spider (M ittelholzer 28). Someone who is from Guyana, as well as those who are not, can understand the closeness and connection with the landscape that can be felt in this place. The impact it has on a person leads him/her to have a true respect the land and so the native Guyanans did, until fortune hunters foraged the land and defaced its beauty.

By telling about some of the saddening events which happened in this tropical land, such as how “the savannah began to grow parched and bare of grass, trenches and ponds dried up, cattle grew thinner for want of good food, and the rice-fields from pale yellow had turned deep yellow” (Mittelholzer 217), Mittelholzer is referencing the aftermath of the foreign intruders who ravaged the land for profit. Rice had become in short supply, with much of the previous year’s bounty exported. This drove up the price for the home dwellers, making the rice dealers happy, but not “the poor small farmers [who] would grumble and say . . . that life was hard for them” (217).

When the sugar harvest began, “people from everywhere” came in for work on the sugar estates, and this labor went on day and night, “like some relentless monster of Fate” (220). The sounds from the factory could be heard at any given time during the early morning, the evening, even at midnight; it reverberated against “the sepia peace of dawn” (220). Mittelholzer declares that the sound is “cold and detached, uncaring” about the lives of the people surrounding the metal money-making machine. At the same time this was taking place, “the savannah grew drier and drier and the grass more and more stunted and sparse” (221), indicative of the natives’ lives. As colonization lingered for years, the indigenous peoples possessed less and less of themselves; their lives were stripped away, thus becoming drier and drier as they had to work for the colonizers just to survive, while the Europeans became rich. The harsh treatment they received resulted in forced submission, even death; causing their communities to become stunted and sparse.

Even the rice paddies on the Corentyne plain are representative of the Caribbean landscape before colonization took place. The “carpet was stunning, “thick and soft like a Persian rug.” Dark clouds, European intruders began enveloping the “emerald” patch, taking on the appearance of “a hurrying chariot of gloom,” making it look “as though a painter, in a

sullen whim, had daubed it over to portray his mood” (Mittelholzer 30). And the faraway roar of the heavy rain sounded “as though thousands of busy devils were groaning and hissing for all they were worth,” causing the savannah to crumble into the fog and quite possibly never reappear (82).

Early on in the novel, Mittelholzer makes a reference to Francis Bacon’s *The Vicissitude of Things*, giving the reader an indication of Mittelholzer’s feelings toward the colonial representations of British Guiana, arguing against Bacon’s suggestion that “tropical climes had a degenerative effect on its inhabitants” (Mittelholzer 17). While he felt this was not true of the native inhabitants, it was definitely true of those who vanquished the land (Ramenofsky 241). But the Caribbean Coast would survive, this being seen in the first chapter of *Corentyne Thunder* when Kattree, one of Ramgolall’s daughters, suddenly becomes deathly ill, almost dying in the middle of the savannah. Ramgolall calls out to the savannah to help his daughter, but it “seem[s] only to smile dully in reply, passive as Destiny, still as Mystery” (Mittelholzer 24). Kattree represents the land and the people of British Guiana, as well as the other Caribbeans and their native landscape. Her sudden illness signifies the intrusion of foreigners coming in and taking over, making the land their own. This goes on for a while, momentarily for Kattree, years for the natives; then, when the malady no longer has a use for its host (the land and its peoples), it goes away, leaving those left behind to pick up the pieces and continue on.

Part of the process of survival can be heard in the sound of the tom-tom; it is a comforting sound which can be heard across the Corentyne savannah. The tom-tom is synonymous with the native Caribs; but the “cool wind” of the invading Europeans, “droning past their ears” made the comforting sound of the drum turn into a “flat throb in the deepening gloom” (62). It is as if the air itself was affected by the impending devastation which was to come; but it did not give up yet. Even though the wind continued, “droning and then going

quiet” (68), once more one could hear the “animated thudding of the tom-toms from far over the savannah, faint and only barely audible, coming now in soft, padding booms, now flatly and with a little devilish rattle, brought as though on a veering wave through the blue-black night” (68). Ah, “[b]ut the wind came again and blotted out the sound” (68). But, as is ever the case, one cannot stop the dawn, ever rising each morning, its beauty giving renewed strength to the weary. It is lovely, and one can witness “the pink wisps [which] seem to come out from a sort of honeycomb” (69). The Corentyne landscape has a special beauty all its own, with even the wild shrubs, “a choppy ocean of varied greens,” looking as if they were planted on purpose to enhance the beauty of the savannah (70). Sadly, it is not to continue to be a scene of loveliness as the wind of the invaders continues to blow. The premonition of doom continued through “midnight clouds,” as the wind, softly and through a chill, brought heavy rain, leaving “the east look[ing] sad with the blood of a hurt pink flower” (68), causing those born here to feel “locked out” (70).

Each member of the body of land is hurt and cries out for all to hear. The voice of the conch speaks loudly and is heard across the vast expanse of the Corentyne savannah. It “moan[s] quietly, telling a tale of peace and simple folk minding cows, of mud-houses and rice-fields, creaketteh hawks and muddy-watered canals, brown and rippled; moaning like a portent, too, as though foretelling the things of the future in the veiled core of its lonely cooing” (70-71). Even the sky bemoans the onset of colonization by the Europeans. After the harsh rains, it relaxes, reflecting a “deep burnt-umber hue” accompanied by “long veins of pale gold” (92). But this breath was momentary, for as the sun goes down, “the pale gold bands in the west” weaken “into a drab white colour” (92). The stunning sky is representative of the beautiful Corentyne savannah and its people, happy to be who they are; while the weakening reflects how the natives were coerced into succumbing to the stronger foreigners, who were the ones with the “drab white colour” (92).

The Carib natives believed the Europeans were coming to rally round them and help in any way they could. Feeling a false sense of security, later that evening Ramgolall sits outside his hut and beats his drums as was his custom. The solid, steady rhythm of the tom-tom echoes throughout the Corentyne Coast, conjuring up disturbing images to haunt one's mind. The nights are usually quiet and peaceful, allowing reflection of the day past, but this night is a bit different. Ramgolall notices that "in the west, a white fan of light, like ghostly dust, wavered against the dark blue sky," and he has an uneasy feeling inside, though he knows not why (Mittelholzer 25). He then begins to think upon Big Man, the guy who had swayed Ramgolall's daughter, Sosee, with lures of the things money could buy, and she became his, giving up her past for the hope of better things to come in the future.

The steady beat of the Corentyne thunder, tum, tum, tum, tum, radiating through the hands of Ramgolall, could possibly be reaching the not-so-distant ears of those across the plain, giving rise to thoughts of the injustice done to others. The Europeans were unfeeling toward the Caribbeans and their environment, not caring whether they lived or died; and they, like "the savannah[,] would have smiled on in passive secrecy" (40).

One of the main characters in *Corentyne Thunder* is Big Man. He was synonymous with the big Europeans who came in and terrorized the land. When he surveyed his many children, who represented the Caribbean people, he felt "big and significant," for he was "their author" and "responsible for their existence" (102). He even had favorites, whose "future he planned with care," as opposed to those who "were still mere animals" (104).

One such favorite was Geoffrey, who had taken a shine to his half-sister Kattree. The relationship between Geoffrey and Kattree is the epitome of what the "educated" white man came in and did to the "backwoods" native Caribs; use them and abuse them. This can be concluded in the description of the scene when they awoke after sleeping for almost two hours.

The sky is described as “grey-blue from the heat” and the “savannah seemed to be a mirage, unreal and trembling.” The air as well “felt like a warm silk scarf wrapped tightly around their faces and threatening in a half-hearted way to stifle them” (122). *Smother* is exactly what the Europeans did to the Caribbeans once they discovered the landscape could serve to increase their monetary reservoirs.

When Kattree thought of Geoffrey, “her mind [would] go into a kind of pained whirl, so that she seemed to hear the moaning of wind, with thunder, and the roar of flood-water, all making a dreadful chaos in her soul” (135). This is how the Carib must have felt about the arriving people who could have possibly put up the guise of coming in to help the native population and surrounding lands become more productive. The only thing was that the incomers did want the people and lands to become more productive, but only for themselves, not the natives. Kattree was even warned by her friend, Jannee, that the white people could not be trusted, because they had “white skin” and she had “dark skin” (137). But Kattree did not care, for she was blindly in love with Geoffrey. When a person cannot see past the end of their nose, everything seems “to be made of pink and gold” (212). They cannot see the “blue-grey monster” (211) waiting to devour its victim. Mittelholzer could be saying that we should not be so trusting of people. As Ramgolall put it, “Everywhere one turned there was a dark cloud. An evil world” (203).

Big Man is a representation of the evil western foreigner who came into the Corentyne Coast in order to make his fortune, and it did not matter who or what he had to step on to get it. This can be determined in Big Man’s demeanor with Sosee. When she became belligerent, he had no qualms about slapping her, whether her father was present to witness it or not (Mittelholzer 26). Years went by, Sosee bore seven children for Big Man, so there appeared to be no reason to worry about those things any longer. Time had “smoothed over everything”

(26). This could be the same type of feeling Ramgolall had towards Big Man. Someone comes over with the pretext of being nice and wants to be your friend, all the while plotting to take away from you the things you love the most. Take notice of the term “Big Man.” Big Man was a white man, rich, and possessed the character to come in and take what he wants, no matter what anyone thinks. The Europeans did the exact same thing, invading the land, calling it their own, with no regard for those who have lived there for thousands of years. Overcoming the natives was just the first step; once jurisdiction was established, the land was used for whatever purposes the intruders desired.

Big Man is the epitome of the self-serving, superior white man. This is evidenced when, as he is riding through Speyerfield Village to pay off the family of the girl who was pregnant with his son Geoffrey’s baby, he took note of what he saw, the well-dressed East Indians barking orders to “figures” (106), the estate-staff of the hospital, the deputy-manager, the chemist, the engineer. These people were white; even the overseers were all white; an indication from Mittelholzer that it was accepted and expected that white people should hold powerful positions. One could suppose that Europeans landed in the Caribbean and convinced the natives that they did not have the knowledge to make the land productive; they should leave that to the white people. Geoffrey, who is himself a representation of the rape upon the landscape, feels the forthcoming invasion as his body shudders, “feeling the chill in the wind and the chill of fear in his soul,” causing him to feel that “[t]he darkness of the night” was “suddenly a thing of dread” (97). It was as if “[t]he incidents of the future seemed to crouch hidden in the gloom out there like huge monsters waiting to overwhelm him – unknown monsters which made them all the more fearsome” (97).

Even Big Man, as proud and money-hungry as he had become, was subject to bouts of nostalgic reminiscence occasionally. He was sitting with Dr. Roy in Dr. Roy’s study when a sea- and savannah-flavored wind sailed in through the open window and tossed them both back

to their childhoods where precious memories are formed. These savannah winds included those that “hummed with a soothing peace” as well as those that “moaned in the gloom of evening.” Their minds cruised on to the “childhood reveries in the yearning shade of a coconut glade, besprinkled with sunshine and lulled by the crackle of the fronds overhead” (118). The ability to create these types of wonderful memories is in jeopardy when people do not respect the land; such as tearing down trees to make more fields for harvesting, just for the sake of a dollar.

To Ramgol all, that dollar was the most important thing in his life. This is demonstrated when he apparently has a heart attack upon finding out that all his life’s savings have been stolen (232). His worship of wealth parallels the Europeans’ desire to acquire riches, even if it meant treating others unfairly. Ramgolal I cheated those who bought milk from him by adding water to the containers (37), and likewise the Europeans took over the Caribbean lands for their own profit, thus cheating the natives out of their natural heritage. Even though the people were upset about the invasion of their homeland, “not a single thing in the landscape . . . seemed to have changed in sympathy” (240). Even the sky and stars betrayed the natives, with the sky looking “cool and rather sinister” and “the stars had an evil look, like emeralds and rubies cursed by the high-priest of a temple centuries ago” (98). Mittelholzer expresses his confusion as to why the land does not cry out about the events taking place around it:

Surely the savannah must know that Ramgolal was dead and that there were pebbles and pieces of dried mud lying scattered on the floor in the mud house. It looked so untroubled, so flat and at peace as though nothing at all had happened. And the sky, too, and the wind, the sunshine – all untroubled, the same as they had been yesterday and all the days before: the sky blue, the wind cool, the sun

red because it was low in the west. Ramgolall was dead, but the whole

Corentyne remained just the same. (240-241)

How could this stunning, seductive terra firma be so cold and unfeeling at a time when it should be crying out in pain at the injustice of it all?

Feeling betrayed by the land itself, as well as by the stronger Europeans, the natives are justifiably upset. But, time marches on, memories fade. According to Mittelholzer, “all that was gone years and years ago. Why think darkly of it? The years smoothed over everything” (Mittelholzer 26). This is a reflection of how the native Caribs were expected to feel about the European invasion of their lands when it appeared as if there was no end in sight; the colonizing and slavery continued even after slavery was outlawed. It has been years since the days of colonialism, but that will not erase the memories, the stories told by family members, the history that has been written. It is hard to forget when your entire world, your land, your history, has been vanquished by those of other nationalities who cared only about themselves.

Fortunately, there are those who *will* speak out against this injustice, in one form or another. Aside from all the authors mentioned and discussed throughout this paper, there are still others who seek to inform the world concerning this era in our history. One such writer is Shaun Irlam; according to him, even poetry reflects the battle waged between the stronger Europeans and the weaker Caribbeans. He states in an essay that in James Grainger’s poem *The Sugar-Cane*, Grainger stresses the point that “the Caribbean and American colonies were the major theater of British empire-building in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and that sugar was the foundation of that economy” (Irlam 379). Although it is the intent of Grainger that his poem be used “as a handbook for the successful reproduction of colonial planter society,” he unwittingly “was clearly moved to wonder and delight by the fecund and exotic splendor of the West Indies” (qtd. in Irlam 378). Irlam continues in his article to contend how

Grainger inadvertently uses the “power of nomenclature” to project that “[t]he utilitarian values and possibilities of the landscape consistently take precedence” within the poem.

The powerful influences forced upon the physical and mental landscape of the Caribbean and the manipulation of its peoples into becoming slaves, wreaked havoc among its inhabitants. It paved the way “for the clash of conflicting traditions and ways of life, for endless permutations and combinations of race hatred and contempt, of envies and sycophancies, of bullyings [sic] and inferiority complexes and pathetically swaggering over-compensations” (Gafoor 2). This influence upon Mittelholzer and his heritage dominated his entire life and writings (2), giving rise to the understanding of how a person’s existence is interlinked with his/her environment. Juanita Cox, who wrote the Introduction to the latest edition of *Corentyne Thunder*, states that Mittelholzer wrote “on subjects that he thought would benefit Caribbean society” (Mittelholzer 12). Cox’s closing comments are quite favorable toward Mittelholzer, saying that *Corentyne Thunder* gives a “voice to those who, in literature, have been marginalized” and it makes a bold commitment to the Caribbean reality (18).

CHAPTER 3: A VOICE CRIES OUT

Jean Rhys was born in the Caribbean land of Dominica, an island located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, about one-half of the way from Puerto Rico to Trinidad and Tobago; she lived here until she moved to England during her teen years. The island of Dominica was facing the advance of the Spanish, French, English, and Dutch during the sixteenth century (Honychurch 291), but fortunately “was the last island in the Caribbean to be colonized by Europeans,” due to “[i]ts thick oceanic rain forests” (291). But, the Dominicans and their land were like all the other unfortunate peoples of the Caribbean, because eventually their land was also “seized, divided and sold by the Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the establishment of plantation agriculture” (291).

The blood which ran through Rhys’ veins was a mixture of Creole (a person of European descent born in the West Indies or Spanish America) from her mother and Welsh from her father, giving her an identity that is somewhat questionable. Helen Carr, who contributed an essay on Rhys to the book, *West Indian Intellectuals*, points out that “[t]he Caribbean’s violent imperial history has as its legacy a population that is both heterogeneous and hybrid” (42). Renowned authors like Kamau Brathwaite, whose Caribbean identity is non-disputable, had a difficult time considering Rhys to be Caribbean, claiming that she was an “alien outsider” (Carr 42). Carr says that she considers her to be a white Caribbean Creole. Although she was considered a white Creole writer, Rhys’ love of country never diminished; her roots remained grounded in the Caribbean. This led her to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* in which she describes the plight and perils of Antoinette Cosway. Michi ko Kakutani states in an article he wrote for the *New York Times* “that her heroines were all self-portraits, that her novels were all closely embedded in the facts and emotional realities of her own life” (C4). Specifically, set in a postcolonial time frame, *Wide*

Sargasso Sea re-traces the steps of Antoinette Cosway and reveals to the reader how the unconscious lives of the characters are intertwined with the landscape.

Through Antoinette, Rhys is giving voice to the mad wife, Bertha Mason, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, providing a back story to the novel and allowing the wife, who never speaks in *Jane Eyre*, but speaks much and loudly in WSS, to reveal how she feels about being an outsider, having a bloodline of conflicting cultures which has twisted her soul and tormented her mind. This is a result of the European invasion and colonization of the Caribbean Islands after Columbus' discovery. Those who had an English ancestry but also possessed West Indian blood were not considered Caribbean Indians and were considered outcasts by the "true" natives. It is the European element in them that was hated, due to the fact that the European colonizers forced the Caribbean natives and implanted Africans into slavery, taking their land and mistreating them. Rhys gives voice to Antoinette, who is allowed only screams and animal noises in *Jane Eyre*, so she can speak out against these injustices against the people, and Rhys also gives voice to the Caribbean land that provided the wealth which built the great estates of England, such as Rochester's (Bertha's and Antoinette's husband's name) home.

Once the Emancipation Act is passed in 1833, Antoinette's father finally accepts defeat and realizes that he can no longer maintain Couli bri, their homestead, without the aid of slavery. Thus, he drinks himself to death, leaving Antoinette's mother, Annette, to bear alone the brunt of raising two children, Antoinette and her sickly brother Pierre, within the confines of a dwindling estate. It is too much for Annette to bear, so she slowly withdraws into herself, leaving Antoinette to survive on her own. She herself begins to withdraw inwardly, finding solace in her only friend, Tia, the daughter of a neighboring slave family.

The garden at Couli bri Estate where Antoinette grew up holds a special place in her heart as well as in understanding the underlying themes Rhys was writing about. Antoinette first

describes the garden as “large and beautiful,” comparing it to the Garden of Eden which contained “the tree of life.” She goes on to say that “[o]rchids flourished,” with a gorgeous mix “of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see” (Rhys 19). But, this beautiful garden turns from a peaceful sanctuary into a hideous place. Antoinette notes that the orchids are “out of reach . . . [and] not to be touched” (19). She describes one as “snaky looking, another like an octopus,” and although “[t]he scent was very sweet and strong[, she] never went near it” (19). This can be seen as a perfect reflection of the relationship between the colonizing Europeans and the Caribbean people. The colonizers came over with flowery, beautiful words that they were there to help the Caribbeans and offered them the world, their words having the colors of “white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see” (19); their words were “very sweet and strong, but at the same time making the natives to feel that the colonizers were “out of reach . . . [and] not to be touched” (19).

The old wall inside the garden at Coulibri is where Antoinette finds solace when a little girl runs after her, taunting her and calling her a “white cockroach” (Rhys 23). Since Antoinette is alone most of the time, she begins to spend much of that time in the discarded flower garden. She feels comforted here because even after the abolition of slavery and those who had been suffering were “free”, the bourgeois, those still in power maintained that the only way these people could become civilized is to continue working (Bogues 14); thus tyranny, slavery and exhaustion of the land continued. There was no comfort to be found anywhere, so Antoinette sought solace wherever she could find it, and in this case it was the broken down garden wall. Bogues also states that “decolonization created a postcolony rather than a postcolonial condition” (26). This condition resulted in the political term “tribalism” in which the natives were considered irrational barbaric peoples (26). One can see those barbaric traits

throughout this novel within the minds of some of its characters, Antoinette's mother being one of the most prominent.

People who have a mixed blood ancestry often find it difficult to determine where they belong so they constantly find themselves searching for who they really are; Rhys did that all her life. Sometimes it is much easier to take comfort in the presence of nature because it is not condescending and judgmental. As Antoinette explores the grounds bordering the Coulibri estate, she finds herself in areas seemingly untouched by humans, the only inhabitants being that of flowers surrounded by ants and snakes. She does not mind this because these things, even when "the razor grass cut [her] legs and arms [she] would think 'It's better than people'" (28). The people Rhys are alluding to could correspond to the intruders who ravaged the landscape. The splendor of the Caribbean paired against the backdrop of the land devastation and colonization which took place could be compared to Antoinette's next thought: "Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer. I knew the time of day when though it is hot and blue and there are no clouds, the sky can have a very black look" (Rhys 28).

Mr. Mason, the man from England who married Antoinette's mother, Annette, reflects a prime example of those who came over to the Caribbean in order to profit from the land. Within the story, Antoinette could see this in Mr. Mason quite clearly. In her own words, she stated that "he came to make money as they all do" (Rhys 30). As the price was relatively cheap for some of the larger estates, she also made the comment, which was probably in his thoughts, that "one unfortunatè's loss is always a clever man's gain" (Rhys 30). As Antoinette tried to help Mr. Mason understand about how the English felt about the Caribbeans, he thought it utter nonsense, leaving Antoinette to come to the conclusion that none of the English understood the native Caribbeans (Rhys 30).

After Mr. Mason becomes Antoinette's step-father, he makes the decision to repair the

degrading Coulibri Estate, much to the disappointment of Antoinette, for when they arrive back after a stay with her aunt, she makes the observation that it looked the same, “[b]ut it didn’t feel the same” (Rhys 30). Gone was her sanctuary, her refuge, the ramshackle garden, which was the one place where she could relax and be herself without the pressures of being with outsiders, pretending that they like her, when in reality she knows they do not. Here they are, poor half-breeds, living with, even married to, the white enemy who stole their land, and they expect no one will take notice, or take action? Actually, Antoinette’s mother became so upset with the discontent of the community that she began to plead with her husband to move them away from here and take them to his homeland, England. Mr. Mason just laughed at her, stating that they were “too . . . lazy to be dangerous” (Rhys 32). Little does he know; but Antoinette knows. Even though she is a child, the surroundings speak to her. She can “hear the bamboos shiver and creak though there was no wind.” She goes on to observe that the air “had been hot and still and dry for days. The colours had gone from the sky, the light was blue and could not last long” (Rhys 34). Antoinette did not realize at the time that her environment was distressed with a sense of foreboding; for later that evening her home would be burned. Set ablaze by those who called herself, her mother, her Aunt Cora, and the servants “white niggers” and Mr. Mason “the black Englishman” (Rhys 42).

As Antoinette turns to witness her home going up in flames, her mind peruses the pictures of the tropical paradise which was her sanctuary, of “the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, . . . the jasmine and the honeysuckle” (Rhys 44-45). She knows that she will never see Calibri again, and if there can be any good thing about this purposeful destruction, it is that now there is nothing which “could be stolen or burned” (Rhys 45). Antoinette was half-right, for her mother would indeed be stolen from her

as a result of the burning of Cal i bri; for the fire, the parrot, and the death by burning of Pierre, Antoinette's mentally and physically handicapped brother (who represents the weak islanders), was too much for Annette. She would never again be the same. After her mother went to stay in the countryside to recuperate, Antoinette went to see her and was severely rejected, so she stayed with her Aunt Cora until she, Antoinette, was sent to a convent.

Convents, although not a natural part of the Caribbean landscape, are a physical part of the landscape. The convent in the story is representative of the "good" people who are there to help you, meaning the white Europeans. Antoinette called the convent her "refuge" (Rhys 56), for she believes they are good people and will help her feel accepted, but in the same sentence called it "a place of sunshine and of death" (Rhys 56). She goes on to remark that the entire place "was brightness, or dark" and "Heaven and Hell" (Rhys 57), noting that the flowers in the garden and the nuns' habits were bright, indicating peace. Whereas the "their veils, the Crucifix hanging from their waists, the shadow of the trees, were black, signifying unrest and death (Rhys 57). This could be indicative that during the time of colonization, only white (the superior Europeans) and black (the inferior natives) were acknowledged; anything in between would be rejected, as a bastard child. Antoinette was in the rejected category, being of a mixed race; but she (hybrid Caribs) was this way because of European infiltration and the intermarrying or sexual relations between the natives and foreigners. It was not "her" fault, yet "she" had to suffer the consequences of others' actions.

Wide Sargasso Sea is written in three parts, with the first and last section being poured out from the heart of Antoinette, and the second part is the view from the vantage point of her husband. Interestingly enough, Rhys does not identify the husband with a name; it is assumed to be Rochester, who is the husband of Bertha in the novel *Jane Eyre*. Rhys patterned her book after this novel in order to give the "crazy woman" a voice of her own. In the third and final

part of the novel, Antoinette does call her husband by the name Rochester, when she asks if he has been to see her (Rhys 182). So throughout the rest of this paper, I will refer to Antoinette's husband as Rochester. He is English and apparently his marriage to Antoinette has been arranged, for he states that he and she were married just four short weeks after his arrival to the islands; and he was sick with a fever for three of those (Rhys 67). One can easily see through the façade that this marriage represents; it obviously illustrates how the English and others came to the Caribbean, seeking their own fortune, not caring a whit about those they "marry."

Rochester begins his point of view by describing his new wife, Antoinette. He comments about her having "sad, dark alien eyes" and claiming to be "Creole of pure English descent" (Rhys 67). He is not convinced, declaring that she is "not English or European either" (67), even possibly agreeing with the non-native porter who is helping them load up for Granbois, a small estate formerly owned by Antoinette's mother where they are going to spend a few weeks, who informs Rochester that "these people are not civilized" (68). Although he has not spent much time getting to know Jamaica, Rochester has already formed his opinions of the place, thinking that [e]verything is too much, . . . [t]oo much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near" (70). He did begin to sway toward acceptance, when standing on the veranda at Granbois he "breathed the sweetness of the . . . [c]loves . . . cinnamon, roses and orange blossom" and noted that they exuded "an intoxicating freshness" (73). Rhys is telling us that the invading colonists felt this way as well. Upon first entry into this alluring land they were still full of their dark, damp, and cold homeland (Rhys 80), thinking that these people were "stranger[s] who did not think or feel as [they] did" (93); but they could not help but take notice of the vibrant beauty of the flowers with their exotic fragrances which are difficult to ignore. The hope that the English would succumb to the lavish richness of the tropics was short lived, because Rochester stepped on a wreath and it filled the air

with “the scent of crushed flowers” (74). This is an equivalency to the big, stronger European invaders coming in and “crushing” the spirit of the islanders; I posit this is the point Rhys is attempting to make.

Teresa Winterhalter, a writer for *Narrative* magazine, says that Rhys structured the novel “upon a potential geography of sexual difference in which (quite predictably) the civilized world of England is symbolized as masculine and the island paradise of the Caribbean aligns as feminine” (219). This is what creates Rochester’s distress about Martinique, because he is searching for “an island (feminine) paradise, yet Martinique does not afford him bliss” (220). He destroys Antoinette in his unfulfilling search, using her in the hopes of finding his paradise and when it does not come to fruition, he puts her away, thus ruining her exotic landscape.

It is interesting to note that although Rochester apparently despises Jamaica, he cannot help but appreciate its loveliness. He describes the area surrounding Granbois as “a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing secret loveliness” (Rhys 87). He even stated that the rain, a “dancing playful rain” sounded like “music [he] had never heard before” (90). But, the luscious landscape was destined to be crushed, its beautiful petals dropping one by one, until there are none left; so the poem must be true which states that “all beautiful things [have] sad destinies” (86).

After slavery was abolished, it was still extremely difficult for the native islanders to trust those who had colonized them for the sake of profit; trust is something that must be earned and the colonizers had not shown any concern about being trusted. The incoming Europeans wanted the Amerindians to trust them so the natives would allow them to rule and utilize the land for revenue. Rhys was saying just that, when in Part Two Rochester recounts his attempts to convince Antoinette to trust him and he promises to give her “peace, happiness, [and] safety” (Rhys 79). The indigenous peoples need to realize “that the dark forest always wins?” (167).

Perhaps the most analogous example in *Wide Sargasso Sea* which Rhys uses to illustrate how the stronger Europeans came in like pirates conquering a ship and overpowered the weaker Caribs for the sake of riches is just after Rochester informs Christophine that he is savvy about her past, the trait of madness which runs through her veins. He feels as if he is living in a “cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it” (Rhys 181); he begins to wonder if he will ever see England again, and looks out at the royal palms, standing tall and defiant. Even “[s]tripped of their branches [they stand] like tall brown pillars; whereas a”[t]he bamboos take an easier way, they bend to the earth and lie there, creaking, groaning, crying for mercy” (163-164). The natives must bow and succumb to these bandits or be vanquished, for these pirates do not want to share their gold, precious things, jewels, their found treasure; they want it all” (169). “Gold is the idol they worship” (188).

Not only is this the story of a woman who must deal with the embarrassment of and come to terms with being a person of mixed cultures, white and Dominican, hence the term “Creole”; but underneath this apparent theme, is also a story symbolizing the physical and mental sufferings of the natives of the Caribbean and their tropical lands, who must surrender and be absorbed into the stronger and more powerful white culture which comes in and overtakes everything, from the landscape to the ladies, imposing upon these indigenous peoples their European brand of capitalism. It is the story of a culturally mixed woman struggling to create a coherent life in a society that rejects her from both sides. This persona, Antoinette Cosway, parallels the life which the Caribbean natives had to conform to in order to survive.

CHAPTER 4: MIRROR TO THE SOUL

I chose to save the evaluation of Wilson Harris' *The Palace of the Peacock* until last because originally I felt that this work of fiction would be just a small addition to the former works that are so rich in parallels to the colonization of native Caribbeans by the opportunistic Europeans. Upon re-entering the pages of this highly allegorical novel, I find myself entranced by the overall symbolism and the metaphorical correlation to the detrimental infiltration of European influences. Due to the fact that there are so many illustrations, I have selected only the most representative selections of script which most assuredly reflect Caribbean devastation. To begin with, I must agree with T. J. Cribb, who wrote a review which focused on several of Harris' writings, when he states that "a truly original writer creates the taste by which he is to be relished," also stating that "one of the many values of his essays is that they firmly mark out the autonomy of the territory of art" (Cribb 140). Harris' poetic illustrations include the adversity between the Spanish and the Caribs, as well as the emergence of "a new topography of the imagination and of the human" (141). Cribb also asserts that Harris possesses "remarkable originality" in his writings and is responsible for the development of "a new canon," due to his assessment of "some of the European philosophic sources of post-structuralist and deconstructive theory;" thus giving his work the value of "art" (140). Harris' "innovative critical ideas" have earned him the acknowledgement of being hailed as master by some of Guyana's own great authors, such as "Pauline Melville, Fred D'Aguiar, and David Dabydeen" (Cribb 140). They acknowledge him because "they have been vouchsafed [with] a new canon of critical writings of remarkable originality" (Cribb 140). Cribb continues on in his accolades of Harris by stating that he "is the best intellectual and imaginative resource we have for understanding all those kinds of writing at present incoherently addressed by postcolonial theory," giving the reason that

“it is Harris' liberation of what one might call the postcolonial potential within colonial texts that is the most dynamic for our times” (Cribb 140). Harris is a man of unusual distinction, which is why I chose one of his works, *The Palace of the Peacock*, to illustrate how the Spanish and others desecrated the Caribbean landscape for their own purposes and how it affected the natives and Africans who were forced into slavery.

In *The Palace of the Peacock*, Harris has the intrinsic ability to combine the natural world with the dream world. The reader feels s/he is in one world when suddenly s/he is in another where it appears to be a war of man against nature. “The novel tells of a search, a journey where two forces confront one other, a cruel materialism and an idealism” (Steele 64). In Harris’ own words in the “Prologue,” he confirms “how the fiction validates itself through buried or hidden curiously live fossils of another age” (Harris 7). The Europeans may seem aloof about the Caribbean colonization, but the “[p]roof penetrates . . . [their] mask of complacency” (Harris 7).

According to Harris, *The Palace of the Peacock* authenticates itself without the help of outside influences through the image of the bone-flute (Harris 9). In other words, the construction of this narrative, although fiction, is very symmetrical to how the Spanish conquistadors marauded the Caribbean landscape and also to how the natives felt about the situation. After all, assembling a musical instrument from the bones of your enemy makes for a bold metaphorical statement. Harris goes on to indicate that aside from the “obvious violation” (Harris 9), the bone-flute becomes the bizarre bastion housing both the spirit of the enemy and the spirit of the other soul, thus becoming “an organ of self-knowledge suffused with enemy bias so close to native greed for victory” (Harris 10).

When anyone reads the works of Harris, they can see the clandestine mutual dependence which takes place “between oppressor and oppressed within a culture” and to coincide with that,

one can also perceive a mutual, but veiled, understanding which exists between the two (Cribb 141). Two cultures, two worlds, where no one would imagine they share anything in common, yet when circumstances thrust them together, one entering the landscape for the sheer purpose of fortune, one scrambling to save their landscape from despair, the two become closer than either group would care to admit. Wilson Harris truly does create in *The Palace of the Peacock* a unique style of authorship by being able to successfully intertwine the “tropical rainforest” and the topography which exists in the mind, of which emerges “a new topography of the imagination and of the human” (Cribb 141).

This new topography was born out of necessity. When the Europeans took control of Caribbean islands with the purpose of making a profit, in their minds they were justified, just as the natives and slaves rationalized their weak compliance to these marauders; but according to one interpretation of Wilson Harris’ novel, “no one is innocent in the destructive process which takes place everywhere” (Durix 5). In other words, the colonizing Europeans have a responsibility to take care of the land they are using; but, the weaker Caribbean and African peoples who continually stand by and watch those who are stronger come in and devastate the landscape just for the sake of monetary gain are also responsible. This puts the responsibility to care for the land in the hands of both parties. Foreigners begin infiltrating your land under the guise of making things better, then suddenly those who were born here are forced into slave labor so the intruders can profit from your blood, sweat, and tears; this is a difficult situation to stand up against.

Again, the answer lies within the landscape; the landscape of the physical topography as well as the landscape of the mental topography. The indigenous Caribs did not want to leave their paradise; they were here first and “understandably distrusted intruders” (Cohen 504), so why should they abandon all that they know? Hence it became necessary to go through an

“evolution, [a] complex regeneration” (Harris 10) in order to survive. This was true for both the people and the landscape; they both must let go of bias and “undergo a visionary, inner-space translation” so that neither will be destroyed. This bias and all its definitions are woven throughout the novel, allowing us the reader to observe the different landscapes being transformed from one shape into another (Harris 11). Also sewn throughout the novel are metaphorical and metaphysical threads of prejudice and unfairness which can be seen in how the conquistadors treated the native Caribs. The conquering Europeans treated the native Caribs with very little respect. Even though the landscape could be compared to a “fine beautiful” woman, whom most people would hold up and esteem, Donne, the leader of a group of ghostly visionaries, looked at this “senseless creature” the same way he looked upon fowl and he treated her (it, the landscape, and them, the natives) the same way (Harris 20). Donne goes on to tell his younger brother that if “you rule the land . . . you rule the world” (Harris 23). The Europeans came into the Caribbean with grandiose ideas about taking over and becoming sovereign over the natives, “rul[ing] everything [and with] magical hands dispensing life and death to their subjects as a witch doctor would or a tribal god and judge” (Harris 40). The words of crew member Jennings echo how the Europeans felt about themselves and their capability to take whatever they wanted for their own purposes. He calls himself his own revolution and brags about being able to hold his “ground face to face with Satan” (Harris 78). Nothing and no one can stand against him, not even the “laboring parasite[s] (Harris 78). The people at the Mission, the crew’s destination and representing those who were colonized, felt this and it ran through them like how a chilling wind “blowing on the water” cuts like a cold knife, upsetting “like a tropical fever” and making them fearful while “shaking the leaves of the dreaming forest” (Harris 41).

The premise behind *Palace* revolves around a crew of Spanish Conquistadors who travel through a dense tropical rainforest, typical of Guyana, and must cross a raging river, one similar to the Rupununi River, in order to reach a mission which is high upon the hilltops where they can secure Amerindians to bring back as forced labor for the crews' crops and plantations. The leader of the crew, Donne, is also on a quest to recover his lost love, Mariella, who is also at the mission. Donne's younger brother joins the group and passes on to the reader his observations, which is where the underlying story comes in due to the fact that his views are wildly allegorical of and are the personification of the marauding Europeans who actually did ravage the Caribbean people and their landscape. The strange thing is that all members of the crew are actually ghosts of past conquistadors and they are all in a state of dreaming wakefulness; also having names relating to "an illustration of the cross-cultural figuration the entire party implicitly maintained" (D'Aguiar). They consist of the daSilva twins, Schomburgh, Vigilance, Carroll, Cameron, Jennings, and Wishrop. Due to European infiltration, the ghosts of the crew are composed of a menagerie of family history, ranging from places like Africa, Scotland, Germany, as well as the native Arawak (Harris 39). Walk with me as we shadow the "younger brother."

In his mind between wakefulness and dream-sleep, the younger brother remembers how the landscape of the savannah was etched into his mind from childhood; even in his dreams he knew it was the ground he "must not relinquish", for "the rivers and the flatland, the mountains and heartland were as close to [him] as [his] ribs (Harris 24). The danger felt by the natives and their lands once the European invasion began could be called "a chaos of sensation, even pleasure, faced by imminent mortal danger" (24).

These natives and their natural habitat are represented throughout *The Palace of the Peacock* by a beautiful woman called Mariella. She is the embodiment of the native Caribbean people and their lands, all of which were victims of the colonization which took place, all the peoples and places wronged by the Europeans. Once the crew became aware of Mariella, she "was

the obsession [they] must encounter at all costs” (Harris 26), the ever-elusive El Dorado; but the land speaks out against this. Harris explains in an interview how “the landscape is not a passive creature because it has rhythms, it has complexities, it has dimensions” (Kutzinski 17). It is these things that cry out to those who are hurting it by indeterminate means in order to get them to listen to their psyche so they will understand (17).

Sometimes it takes being face to face with our own psyche, physically, before we begin to understand what we are doing to those around us. The main character, Donne, is one such person. He is the ghost leader of all the Spanish conquistadors who ravaged the Caribbean Islands, as well as South America, in search of that selfsame ever-elusive El Dorado, gold and diamonds, the most precious thing they knew” (Harris 56). He “conquered and crushed the region he ruled, annihilating everyone and devouring himself in turn” (27). Everyone and everything was afraid of the marauding, colonizing Donne, a true representation of the European intruders (38). Thoughts of him pulled a heavy shadow down upon the Caribbean, including the Mission where Mariella lives, as well as “the trees, the wind [and] the water” (38). This brought about a threatening sense of darkness, the beginning of trouble and antagonism between the different cultures (38). Even he despised himself “for being the most violent taskmaster” (50), which indicates that even the most terrible revolutionary has a conscience. Donne voices this thought and immediately questions how these “devils” came to “have title to the savannahs”, calling it “a stupid legacy” (51). He goes on to complain about possibly having court charges filed against him due to the fact that he is still continuing to have slaves after the Abolition Act is passed; he continues with slavery because otherwise he would be “forfeiting a cheap handsome source of labour” (51). He and his crew are very threatening to the Caribbean landscape. Their voyage down the river parallels the Europeans traveling by the same means in order to reach the Caribbean islands. When during their journey they had to leave the raging river and embark upon the land in order to avoid “an impassable fury and obstruction” (26), this is

symbolic of the natives beginning to taking back what is rightfully theirs. Those weak in spirit would turn back and head to safety, but Donne's brother cannot leave his wake-dream and abandon the crew in their "hot and mad pursuit in the midst of imprisoning land and water and ambushing forest and wood" (27). As the crew began hacking their way through the forest on their way back to the river, the wind became "leafy curtains through which masks of living beard dangled" (28). The landscape is alive and feels each swipe of the blade. Once they reach a clearing so they could re-enter the river, "[t]he voice of roaring water declined a little." After hacking through the bush with their sharp blades and preparing to board the boat, "a sigh swept out of the gloom of the trees, unlike any human sound as a mask is unlike flesh and blood. This sound could be heard in the minds of the crew; "[t]he unearthly, half-gentle, half-shuddering whisper ran along the tips of graven leaves. Nothing appeared to stir. And then the whole forest quivered and sighed and shook with violent instantaneous relief in a throaty clamour of waters as we approached the river again" (Harris 28). The younger brother was extraordinarily affected by this, stating that: "I stopped for an instant overwhelmed by a renewed force of consciousness of the hot spirit and moving spell in the tropical undergrowth" (28). The Caribbean landscape is full of life; it is angry and speaking with a loud voice.

According to an article written several years ago for *Ambio* magazine, the tropical rain forests of the Caribbean Islands are in a desperate need to be protected. Rain Forests are a precious commodity in the Caribbean Islands; due to the fact that there are very few of them due to poor management in the past, an increase in the demand "for the benefits derived from the forests" leave the requirement to properly care for this natural resource in our hands with "little room for error" (Lugo et. al. 318). There are several reasons behind this. When these forests are destroyed, inevitable changes to the environment take place. There will be soil erosion due to the simple fact that there are fewer trees to impede runoff from the rains. Secondly, the wildlife population is greatly affected; many species are wiped out completely when rain forests

are destroyed, while others will have to travel elsewhere to find a protective home. The water balance is another change to be reckoned with; if trees are destroyed, the ecosystem equilibrium is upset; the chemical interaction between water and fallen leaves is disturbed, thus affecting the nutrient content of the soil. There are “other environmental changes which, sooner or later, combine to make human habitation at best more difficult and at worst, impossible” (Lugo et. al. 318).

When the fortuitous moment came for the ravaged landscape to strike back against the marauding intruders, those on the receiving end, Donne and his crew, and ultimately the Europeans who had abused the human landscape as well as the physical landscape, had a sense of completeness, as if it all occurred at just the time it was supposed to. His spiritual eyes were finally opened (Harris 100-01). They now saw “a vast impression and canvas of nature wherein everything looked perfect and yet at the same time unfinished and insubstantial;” they also “had an intuitive feeling that the savannahs – though empty – were crowded” (111). These things are all seen through the blind seeing eye of Donne’s brother, but he is representative of all the crew and all the imposing Europeans. It is as if he is seeing the savannahs for the first time, for he states that he “had never before looked on the blinding world in this trusting manner” (112). He watched as “the newborn wind of spirit” created new souls “to become living and alive.” He was also witness to a tree revealing itself to him, waving “its arms” and then suddenly “it shed its leaves” with the “bark and wood turn[ing] to lightning flesh” (112). The beautiful bright sun hanging from its arms now turns into an “enormous starry dress” of which could be seen “the intimate column of a musing neck, face and hands, and twinkling feet. The stars became

peacocks' eyes, and the great tree of flesh and blood swirled into another stream that sparkled with divine feathers where the neck and the hands and the feet had been nailed" (112); he had finally arrived at the Palace of the Peacock, "the palace of the universe and the windows of the soul [which] looked out and in" (Harris 112). People are living souls with a beautiful landscape of their own, just as the physical landscape is stunning and has a soul as well. When others come in to ravage and ruin, "cruel mark[s] and stripe[s] will become visible and cannot be ignored. Water, representative of life, is a force which cannot be reckoned with. In *Palace*, Mariella and the demanding waters are symbolic of the natives in their natural habitat; the conqueror must acknowledge the conquered.

When Donne and his crew finally reach the mission site, no one is there except an old Arawak woman. She is old and withered, a picture of what has happened to the natives and their land after European colonization; but eventually she becomes a muse to the crew, even though in the end, Winthrop goes crazy and shoots and kills her (Harris 57). As Harris states, everyone has had, in a "vicarious daydream" at some point in their lives, had the desire "to kill whatever they had learnt to hate; "[t]his dark wish was the deepest fantasy they knew mankind to entertain" (56). In the third section of the book, called "The Second Death," the old Indian woman becomes a member of their crew for the return voyage home (61). She has been a representative of "the stillness and surrender of the American Indian of Guyana" (61). The colonization of the Caribs had gone on so long that she had "an air of crumpled pointlessness in her expression, the air of wisdom that a millennium was past which showed neither "malice, enmity" nor a "desire to overcome oppression and evil" (61); even though the old native, according to legend, "belonged to a race that neither forgave nor forgot" (61). Her "consciousness of race" now meant "patience" as they were "overpowered by the fantasy of a Catholic as well as a Protestant invasion" (61). When one race becomes colonized by other

nations, they begin to lose their native landscape identity and begin to become co-mingled with their oppressor; this is the reason the “wrinkled self-defense” of the people turns into “universal protection” of both parties, colonizer and colonized. The crew looks upon the old Arawak woman with new eyes, now seeing “the naked unequivocal flowing peril and beauty and soul of the pursuer and the pursued all together, and they knew they would perish if they dreamed to turn back” (62). This is quite a revelation for the native Caribbean community and equates to quite a change in the landscape, both mental and physical. Donne’s brother “knew that a great stone of hardship had melted and rolled away” which caused the “trees on the bank” of the river to be clothed in “a new and enduring spiritual summer of russet and tropical gold whose tints had been tenderly planted in the bed of the stream” (Harris 64). Had harmony between the various cultures finally been reached? Is it possible that “[w]here there had been death was now the reflection of life” (38)?

Those souls the crew is seeking have left the mission and headed for higher ground deeper into the rain forest, above a great waterfall, seeking refuge there. That does not deter the determined crew leader Donne, who continually loses crew members on this quest (Harris 96); so they forge ahead with “unconditional surrender” to the landscape and to face the unknown (84). This is the final section of the novel and is also the place where Donne and his brother’s blind eyes are opened and begin to see things inside themselves. The wall of the waterfall upon which they are attached has many windows which look in upon the soul, allowing for contemplation and reflection. Donne, singularly representing the collective European invaders, begins to see himself as he really is. Even upon taking his first step upon the waterfall wall, he sees “that horror and that hell he had himself elaborately constructed from which to rule his earth” (Harris 101). The outline of a woman begins to take shape, the life of the native Carib. Donne begins to climb higher in an attempt to escape these visions, but as he does so, he feels

“the light shine on him reflected from within” and there is no escape (106). As Donne continues climbing and looks through the window in the wall of the earth, there are mixed metaphors upon which his blind eye sees. The candle upon which he gazes illustrates the light still burning within the native Caribs after colonization. They have not totally been assimilated as the conquerors would like to believe. It was almost extinguished as the woman swept past the flame; but the flame “neither sparked nor flew” (Harris 107). As the slaves realized they were “inwardly melting into nothingness and into the body of . . . [their] death” (107), they began to realize that they must take back what is rightfully theirs. This is the point in history when they began to fight the Europeans for civil justice. This is also the point where many Europeans finally realized they were treating fellow human beings and neighboring landscapes horribly; they “looked into . . . [themselves] and saw that all . . . [their lives they] had loved no one but . . .” themselves (107).

The brother now sees the face of dead crewman Carroll and begins to listen to his whistling; it was a “solemn and beautiful cry” like “the cry of the peacock.” He “had never witnessed and heard such sad and such glorious music” (Harris 113). He was very affected by the music; [t] he dark notes rose everywhere, so dark, so sombre, they broke into a fountain – light as the rainbow – sparkling and immaterial as invisible sources and echoes” (113). One can distinguish from these words that the brother is hearing the sad cries of the native Caribs and the native landscape, wailing against the ravaging of their very souls which are incorporated into the landscape. That cannot be ignored forever; there must come a point when someone listens. The ghosts of the conquistador brothers do finally listen, not only to the “curious distant echo” of the “besieged,” but they have reached a point in the Palace of the Peacock where they must look into the windows of their own souls and “seek themselves – first, outcast and miserable twins of fate – second, heroic and warlike brothers – third, conquerors and invaders of all mankind”

(Harris 114). They have come to the realization that they are “truly nothing” (114). In effect, what does it profit one to divide and conquer if you still end up losing your soul and having to view all the terrible things you have done to people?

The crux of *The Palace of the Peacock* lands upon the waterfall within the cliff the crew approaches (Harris 101). In an interview with Harris by Vera Kutzinski, Harris references the noose that Donne falls into when ascending the steps of the waterfall:

It may seem simple now to look back on it, where the noose that appears is just the noose that hangs a man, and then you have the noose that is a kind of constellation or lightning belt in the sky, and this bears upon theories of hubris in Donne. And then in the end you have Donne sustained by the noose which should strangle him, and that is when you get a link between the inferno and the paradiso because he is in a position then to see the hell on earth that he has helped to create (qtd. in “The Composition”).

The yearning to rule and control, the exhilaration of conquest, the intoxicating sensation of power, these are emotions which have driven mankind since the beginning of time. Unfortunately, when these emotions are allowed to rule one’s life, they become more real and take on a life of their own. In effect, they become a noose which will eventually capture its prey and squeeze the life out of it; it is at this point that the conqueror, who previously had no qualms about mistreating other humans and their landscape, sees his life flash before him and allows him “to see the hell on earth that he has helped to create (qtd. in “The Composition”). The unique writing style of Wilson Harris and his stories of colonial hardship capture this image so well. That is the reason Cribb makes the proclamation that “it is Harris’s liberation of what one might call the postcolonial potential within colonial texts that is the most dynamic for our times” (Cribb 140).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Edgar Mittelholzer, Wilson Harris, and Jean Rhys are each in his/her own way an artist, one who paints the landscape in such a way as to emblazon an indelible impression on those lucky enough to turn the leaves of their art and place themselves in the Caribbean landscape through a mind's eye. Michael Steinberg and Matthew Taylor state that "Landmarks and memorials in a landscape, overt or discreet, play a powerful role in telling us about people's values, history, struggles, and successes" (2). This is certainly accurate within the novels of these authors, for they truly speak of the connection between man and his environment.

Ameena Gafoor is a columnist who writes for the *Kaieteur News*, a newspaper published in central Guyana. She determines that Mittelholzer, as well as Wilson Harris, are "coloured middle-class men with roots in New Amsterdam . . . trying to envisage an alternative society that is free of the ravages of colonialism." Sadly, colonialism happens in many places and it is a shame that it happened in the Caribbean islands.

Edgar Mittelholzer was one of the finest authors of postcolonial literature, being hailed as a "pioneer" of Guyanese literature (On Centennial). His work, *Corentyne Thunder*, gives the reader "a sense of belonging, a sense of rootedness in the land, a portrait of psyche and landscape melding into oneness" (Gafoor). This work of art created by Mittelholzer is a perfect example of how man is intertwined with his environment and shows us that when the native peoples are victimized, so is the land as well.

Rhys was considered a Creole writer, a white Dominican. Clearly she was a child of two cultural inheritances, made up of a combination of her Creole mother and a Welsh father. Her work, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, stresses to the reader that during colonization, both sides, consisting of the oppressor and the oppressed, struggle with a sense of belonging and must seek to find their niche within society, our voice, sometimes never finding it at all. Even though one

may be born on the whiter side of the fence, being of a mixed culture could still pose problems in life. The invading colonizers who made the lands their own did not care what happened to the natives of these lands; their only interest was monetary. The end result not only ruined the landscape, but damaged those whose lives were mingled with their landscape. Antoinette Cosby was a perfect example of this.

Wilson Harris has to be my favorite of those examined within this paper. His unique style keeps the reader guessing as to what exactly is taking place, and then to question, is it really taking place? He gives the reader a look into the psyche of those colonizers who had no trepidation about conquering the lands for their purposes. On the outside, we see them as detestable marauders, caring not for those they oppress, or the lands, which are just as alive as the people. Harris very successfully reveals to us that just as the natives are interlaced with their environment, so those who come in and take over are connected with this new environment and its peoples; it is just difficult for them to realize it.

Colonization is a dark part of the history which makes up our world. Unfortunately, the people who are the weaker must always succumb to those who are stronger; they can fight against the oppressors, but when civilizations are more advanced in ways the victims cannot compete with, then they, the victimized, must become colonized and accept their fate. Edgar Mittelholzer uses *Corentyne Thunder* to address colonization through the lives of Ramgolall, his daughters, and those who live in the community. He reveals through these characters how Man is related to nature and we must respect it. Also disclosed in this novel is how money can affect all that we do. The Spanish began the journey down this road with their search for El Dorado, mirrored by Ramgolall and the obsession he had with his money. Jean Rhys' story, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is a sad one, revealing to the reader how not being able to possess those things we desire the most can drive us crazy. In this prequel to *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette Cosway loved her

husband and wanted to please him, a point which could be made about the Caribbean natives having the desire to please the incoming Europeans, but both were to no avail. We must first love ourselves before we can attempt to reach beyond our grasp. Wilson Harris shows the reader in *Palace of the Peacock* that at some point in time, we all must face the reality of the things we do. All our actions result in consequences; sometimes those consequences are not so pretty when we see them through the windows of our soul. His novel helps the colonizers recognize the devastation they caused.

Finally, in each of these novels, the physical landscape is intertwined with the physical landscape to create a very unique relationship. In *Corentyne Thunder*, Mittelholzer shows the reader how to hear the Corentyne coast through the beating of the drums against the dusky sky and the crackling sounds of thunder on the savannah. Jean Rhys paints a somewhat colorful landscape scene at times in *Wide Sargasso Sea* with her description of the flowers surrounding Calibri Estate; but those two pieces of the physical landscape were destroyed by those who could not accept people for who they were. Wilson Harris provides the most vivid picture of the topography which makes up the tropical rainforests within Guyana; its voice is loud and clear as Donne and his men attempt to reach that which is just beyond their reach. Battling the raging river, slashing and killing the dense, lush tropics, during their quest was too much for the land, so it spoke so loudly, the ghostly conquistadors had no choice but to stop and listen. The things they heard about themselves were heartbreaking and helped them realize that the world did not revolve around them; that we should all look out for one another.

This has been an important study to help us all realize that our actions have consequences. When we as individuals take the interpretations of these readings from these unique works of literature to help us understand who we are as a united group on this planet Earth, and learn from the dreadful actions of others, maybe we will think twice before attacking

those weaker than we are just for the sake of selfish gain. We are all related just by being humans; let us not forget that.

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