

## Toward a “Truly Indigenous Theatre”: Sylvia Wynter Adapts Federico García Lorca

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*This article recuperates the creative work of Jamaican cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter, arguing that her activities as a dramatist and translator constitute foundational efforts to imagine an emerging postcolonial reading public. The article considers Wynter’s heretofore-neglected adaptation of Federico García Lorca’s La Casa De Bernarda Alba. The play appears in the newly founded Jamaica Journal in 1968, alongside an essay theorizing adaptation, production, and sets. Adaptation, for Wynter, is strategy of postcolonial reading that requires careful reinterpretation, an emphasis on historicity, and sensitivity to the imperatives of theatricality. The play evidences Wynter’s concern with the politics and poetics of translation, a transformative act that exemplifies the process of indigenization theorized in her later works. Wynter transforms Lorca’s original, “transposing” it to a Jamaican setting and adding dialogue and content to craft a scathing meditation on the legacies of colonialism. Published shortly after Jamaican independence in 1962, this play imagines a “truly indigenous theatre” as central to the formation a postcolonial public.*

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The concept of “people,” better expressed by the Spanish “*pueblo*” is fast vanishing. The writer who returns from exile at the metropolitan centre to “write for his people”; to seek with them to “break out of identity imposed by alien circumstances,” and to find a new one, must come face to face with the fact that his “people” has become the “public.” And the public in the Caribbean, equally like the public in the great metropolitan centres, are being conditioned through television, radio, and advertising, to want what the great corporations of production in the culture industry, as in all others, have conditioned them to want. Returning from exile at the metropolitan centre, the writer all too often finds that he returns only to . . . another facet of exile. Yet by not returning, the writer continues to accept his irrelevance.<sup>1</sup>

—Sylvia Wynter

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Wynter. “We Must Learn to Sit Down and Talk about a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism,” *Jamaica Journal* 2.4 (1968): 25.

This quote from Sylvia Wynter's seminal 1968 essay "We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism" contains a moment that is brief enough to be overlooked: her claim that the concept of people is better expressed by the Spanish word *pueblo*. Such a statement offers a small glimpse into the translation practices that inform Wynter's cultural criticism and her largely overlooked creative works. Of course, Wynter's turn to Spanish is not arbitrary. Wynter was born in Cuba to Jamaican parents, and an interest in the literature and culture of Spain as well as the historical exchanges between Jamaica and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean animate her early work. She wrote her master's thesis on Spanish drama of the Golden Age before being recruited to teach Spanish literature at the University of the West Indies Mona in 1963 shortly after returning to Jamaica from Europe. Modeling the trajectory of exile and return that she highlights in the epigraph above, Wynter notes that upon her return to Jamaica her degree in Spanish literature, rather than the great works of the English canon, did not initially enable her to be "an interpreter of West Indian Literature. . . . My writing was not a marketable product in the 'branch plant society' to which I returned."<sup>2</sup>

The significance of Wynter's bilingualism on her scholarly and creative sensibility is not adequately appreciated, yet it profoundly informs her thinking about the Caribbean as a space defined in and through translation. To begin to trace this trajectory is to note that Wynter's early translation activities coincide with her intention, announced upon her return to the Caribbean, to found a "truly indigenous theatre."<sup>3</sup> Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, Wynter wrote, adapted, and performed in several plays for BBC-TV and Radio as well as plays for the stage that would later be performed in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean. Her 1958 play *Under the Sun*, which inspired her only novel, *The Hills of Hebron*, (1962) was followed by a musical, *Shh, It's a Wedding*, (1961). With Alex Gradussov, founding editor of *Jamaica Journal*, she wrote a pantomime, *Rockstone Anancy*. Her 1965 play *1865: Ballad for a Rebellion* was an elaborate production depicting the Morant Bay Rebellion, and *Maskarade*, her best-known play about Jamaica's Jonkonnu festival, appeared in 1979.<sup>4</sup>

Among the most neglected of these works, however, are several translation-adaptations. In 1959, Wynter translated Federico García Lorca's play *Yerma* into Jamaican creole for BBC Radio's Third Programme. In 1968, she turned to another Lorca play, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. (Wynter's titles are *The Barren One* and *The House and Land of Mrs. Alba*, respectively.) And in 1979, she translated Francisco Cuevas's play *Jamaica Is the Eye of Bolívar*. These projects do not merely represent an effort to make Spanish-language texts available to local audiences. Rather they reveal Wynter's concern with the politics and poetics of translation, adaptation, and performance, interrelated processes that she theorizes as strategies of postcolonial reading. Wynter made considerable changes to each of the plays, "transposing" them

2 Ibid., 25.

3 "First Novel Wins Acclaim," *Daily Gleaner*, August 9, 1962, p. 24.

4 Daryl Cumber Dance, "Sylvia Wynter," *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press), 500.

to a Jamaican setting and adding new dialogue and content to emphasize politics of race, class, and color. Clustered around the year of Jamaica’s independence in 1962, and conceived in the context of Jamaica’s burgeoning community-centered theatre, these translations form part of Wynter’s earliest efforts to imagine and engage an emerging postcolonial public.

In my call for a return to Wynter’s creative work, I follow Carole Boyce Davies’s argument that the “the creative theoretical split . . . is perhaps less useful when we begin to evaluate some of the writers who come out of the Caribbean region and whose theoretical work is intimately connected to the imaginative.”<sup>5</sup> Traversing this creative-theoretical divide is especially rewarding in the case of Wynter, whose work as a dramatist served as fertile ground for her burgeoning theories on black expressive culture. In “From Masquerade to *Maskarade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project,” Davies reads Wynter’s *Maskarade* alongside her seminal essay, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Towards the interpretation of Folk Dance as a Cultural Process,” citing Wynter’s instructions that “before any attempt is made to produce the play, or even read it, in drama class—drama teachers and drama students would do well to read the article.”<sup>6</sup> A similar argument may be made in reverse—that scholars of Wynter’s critical essays would do well to read her plays.

The primary focus of this essay is Wynter’s one-act adaptation, *The House and Land of Mrs. Alba*, which was published in *Jamaica Journal* in 1968 alongside a tripartite essay explaining Wynter’s theories on adaptation, production, and sets. As I will argue, adaptations provide special opportunities for exploring postcolonial reading practices because they compel both dramatist and spectator to perform acts of critical and creative *reinterpretation*. While Wynter decries the emergence of a public conditioned by a “culture industry,” she also argues that culture itself could provide the means of transforming this “distorted” and “traumatic” reality through *reinterpretation*: “To *reinterpret* reality is to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it. For me then, the play, the novel, the poem, the critical essay, are a means to this end. Not ends in themselves.”<sup>7</sup> Operating as a way to avoid “acquiescent criticism,” reinterpretation entails the ethical imperative to bear witness to the processes that mediate one’s readings of history and culture. It is a tool of the “questioning critic,” one who “cannot take fixity as his stance; he knows himself and his perspective to be molded by a historical process imposed on his being. He writes from a point of view inside the process. He knows that he does. Awareness is all.”<sup>8</sup> Through postcolonial adaptation the creative and the critical merge as dramatist, performer, and spectator assume the role of the questioning critic. Such collective acts of reinterpretation form the basis of Wynter’s vision of a postcolonial reading public.

This essay thus considers adaptation as a process, as well as product, of postcolonial reading. Hitherto neglected by critics, both *The House and Land of*

5 Carole Boyce Davies, “From Masquerade to *Maskarade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project,” *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 205.

6 “Production Notes,” *West Indian Plays for Schools, Vol. 2* (Kingston: Jamaica Publishing House, 1979), 26, quoted in Davies, “From Masquerade to *Maskarade*,” 205.

7 Wynter, “A Little Culture,” 24.

8 *Ibid.*, 27.

*Mrs. Alba* and the accompanying introductory essay serve as one of Wynter's most thorough meditations on the dramatic process and on the intertwined acts of adaptation and translation. Wynter transforms Lorca's 1936 play into a critique of hierarchies of color, gender, and class in the fading colonial society of 1920s Jamaica. The adaptation's anticolonial politics must be understood in the context of a post-independence Jamaica in which the imperative to grapple with colonial legacies was still fresh. In her introductory essay, Wynter observes that Jamaican society is "gripped in a common post-independence paradox, the paradox of a people who having made certain fundamental changes in their way of life, are reluctant to push these changes to their logical conclusion. So they hang on to the recent status quo."<sup>9</sup> Through the use of various metatheatrical techniques, the play exposes this colonial status quo as a kind of construction—albeit a powerful one—not unlike the ruses of theatre itself. Reinforcing this emphasis on alienation from rather than identification with the play's performance of colonial society, Wynter's essay adapts the theories of German playwright and dramatic theorist Bertolt Brecht to the task of postcolonial critique. Through alienation, postcolonial dramatists, performers, and audiences reinterpret and reread the colonial past. "The function of the theatre," Wynter writes, "is to explode fears by bringing them out into the light of day; Lorca's play tapped the roots of the frustration of his Spanish audiences. It is to be hoped that this adaptation can perhaps reach through to the deeper areas of conflict of our own."<sup>10</sup>

As Raphael Dalleo notes, in "A Little Culture" Wynter draws a contrast between "the anticolonial ideal of the people as collective actors, and the postcolonial reality of the public as a collection of private individuals."<sup>11</sup> Wynter's use of the word *pueblo*, however, cited in the epigraph to this essay, resonates differently in the context of her adaptation of Lorca's "*drama de mujeres en los pueblos de España*" ("drama of women in the villages of Spain"). It is tempting to read in Wynter's use of *pueblo* a nostalgia for the harmonious face-to-face interactions imagined to take place in a village or town, the very kinds of settings that Wynter favored in her dramatic productions. *The House and Land of Mrs. Alba*, however, departs from this idealistic construction, offering no nostalgic representations of the people as a stable and "authentic" category. The village was valuable not because it provided access to ideal community, but because it displayed, often through sheer physical proximity, the historical processes that intimately joined the so-called people to their oppressors. As Wynter writes in her introduction to the adaptation, "We ignore that in the present arrangement of society, we carry in ourselves the oppressed and the oppressor, the exploited and the exploiter, the settler and the colonized, the master and the slave."<sup>12</sup> In this formulation, the relationship between the public and the colonial *pueblo* is actually one of continuity rather than rupture—there were no idealistic visions of collectivity to which the postcolonial subject could return. For Wynter, the value of a postcolonial *reading* public lies in its ability to recognize this paradox. To reread the colonial past was to

9 Sylvia Wynter, "Essay and Play Extract: The House and Land of Mrs. Alba," *Jamaica Journal* 2.3 (Sept 1968): 50.

10 *Ibid.*, 50.

11 Dalleo, Raphael, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 313.

12 Wynter, "Essay and Play Extract," 50.

recognize its legacies in the present and to acknowledge the complex set of social relations that define the condition of postcoloniality.

For Wynter, theatre was an ideal space for provocative enactments of these relationships, but its power was not merely representational. Rather, as a collective process of reinterpretation, theatrical adaptation is shown to *constitute* a postcolonial reading public. I invoke reading here as both a literal and symbolic process. On one hand, it is worth noting that in 1968 the publication venue of Wynter’s adaptation, *Jamaica Journal*, was itself engaged in envisioning and addressing a newly formed postcolonial reading public. Along with founding editor and theatre critic Alex Gradussov, choreographer Rex Nettleford, and the novelist Neville Dawes, Wynter was instrumental to the founding of the journal and published several of her early works there. Only one act of *The House and Land of Mrs. Alba* is in circulation, appearing in the September 1968 issue. To date, I have found only one reference to its performance—a staging by university students at University of West Indies, Mona.<sup>13</sup> Yet the “incomplete” presentation of this dramatic script may be read as a specific strategy of black cultural production. As Koritha Mitchell has argued in her discussion of African American lynching plays in the early twentieth century, the one-act format was more conducive to publication in periodicals and also lent itself well to amateur performances or even readings at home.<sup>14</sup> Contributing to the journal’s aim to envision and address a postcolonial reading public, Wynter emphasizes the importance of theatricality in imagining new visions of the nation.<sup>15</sup>

Although Wynter addresses a postcolonial readership through *Jamaica Journal*, she also seeks to model a process of postcolonial reading that draws upon alternative literacies and translation practices. Wynter theorizes adaptation as a dramaturgical practice requiring close readings of texts, an emphasis on historicity, and a keen sensitivity to the imperatives of theatricality. Furthermore, adaptation also implies a specific approach to translation. As Brent Hayes Edwards writes in the “The Taste of the Archive,” “Any cultural criticism must involve a form of translation . . . if to translate in the most basic sense means to carry over content from one instance into another via interpretation.”<sup>16</sup> The basic definition of *adapt* as “to make suitable for a new purpose or to a different context or environment”<sup>17</sup> may help us to understand a range of translation practices in postcolonial contexts that go beyond linguistic translation alone.

Indeed, Wynter begins the introductory essay with the rather provocative claim that “the adaptation sets out to make correspondences clear. Not to translate the play from

13 See Alex Gradussov review “Theatre Thoughts,” *Jamaica Journal* 4.1 (March 1970): 46–52.

14 Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance and Citizenship, 1890–1930* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press), 13.

15 Wynter played a vital role in Jamaica’s turn toward a community-centered theatre in the 1960s, exemplified by the little theatre movement and the construction of smaller performance venues such as The Barn. A new Creative Arts Centre was constructed on the UWI Mona campus, where Wynter served as a lecturer, offering performance opportunities for students. See Bennett, Wycliffe, and Hazel Bennett. *Jamaican theatre: Highlights of the Performing Arts in the Twentieth Century*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2011.

16 Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Taste of the Archive,” *Callaloo* 35.4 (2012): 952.

17 “Adapt,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/2110?rskey=4WxpnO&result=2>, accessed August 03, 2016.

one language into another.”<sup>18</sup> I read Wynter’s statement not as a dismissal of linguistic translation, but rather a call for a strategy of translation that closely attends to the imperatives of performance. To unveil historical and cultural “correspondences” between seemingly disparate settings—“rural Spain” and “backwoods Jamaica”—Wynter employs props, gestures, sound, dialect, as well as characters who “break the fourth wall” to directly address the audience with their own historical observations. These details, inserted as stage directions in the script, significantly invoke performativity even for those who encountered the play only as a text. By commenting on these choices in her essay, Wynter highlights the ways that her adaptation *performs* translation. To attend to “theatre’s complexities as a creative practice and a site of performance” is to contribute to an expanded understanding of the kinds of literaracies that postcolonial subjects bring to the process of reading and translation.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, Wynter excavates a politics of adaptation that contributes to ongoing patterns of cultural transformation: “the dual pattern of adaptation-resistance, central to our history.”<sup>20</sup> It is this process of “adaptation-resistance” that Wynter deemed constitutive to a postcolonial reading public. Wynter’s play and essay offer strategies of postcolonial reading and performance that suggest, as Gradussov contends, “a possible direction for the Jamaican theatre,” as well as postcolonial performance more generally.<sup>21</sup> In order to perform this cultural and political work, the play would have to move past well-honed conventions. As Gradussov writes, “the experimental sometimes has difficulty in finding either a theatre or group prepared to experiment. *Jamaica Journal* therefore offers this essay, and a brief extract of the adaptation, as an example of a direction at present being explored by a Jamaican writer.”<sup>22</sup>

### Reinterpreting Reality: Adaptation as a Strategy of Postcolonial Reading

*La Casa de Bernarda Alba* was Lorca’s final play. It was written in 1936, shortly before his assassination by nationalist militia on the brink of the Spanish civil war. Set in an Andalusian village in the 1930s, the play is often considered alongside *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma* as part of a “rural trilogy,” though Lorca himself had not intended *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* as part of this cycle, and the play was not performed during his lifetime.<sup>23</sup> As the play opens, the patriarch of the family has just died, and with few eligible suitors for the five Alba daughters, the decline of a once powerful family is imminent. His widow, Bernarda, has imposed a strict code of mourning on the house. Bernarda struggles to maintain a facade of respectability and honor by exercising a domineering control over her five daughters. Despite these efforts, dialogue between Bernarda and Poncia, her long-suffering, hawkishly observant maid, reveals Bernarda’s blindness to the chaos brewing in her own house.

18 Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 49.

19 Katja Krebs, Introduction to *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 4.

20 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Toward the Interpretation of Folk Dance as Cultural Process,” *Jamaica Journal* 4.2 (June 1970): 36.

21 Gradussov, “Editor’s Note,” *Jamaica Journal* 2.3 (Sept 1968): 48.

22 *Ibid.*, 48.

23 Christopher Maurer, “Introduction,” *Three Plays: Blood Wedding, Yerma, and The House of Bernarda Alba*, trans. Michael Dewell and Carmen Zapata (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993), ix.

When the eldest daughter is engaged, the jealousy of the other sisters erupts, leading to the youngest daughter’s suicide. Defiant to the last, Bernarda ends the play with a call for silence: “*Yo no quiero llantos. La muerte hay que mirarla cara a cara. Silencio!*” (“I don’t want lamentations. One must look death in the face. Silence!”)<sup>24</sup>

Wynter’s play *The House and Land of Mrs. Alba* is set in a “backwoods parish of the backwoods island of Jamaica in the early nineteen twenties.”<sup>25</sup> The play maintains a “peculiarly Spanish outlook” by engaging Jamaica’s colonial history as well as twentieth-century circuits of migration and travel between Jamaica and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. In Wynter’s play, the Albas are “descendants of refugees who fled to Jamaica from Santo Domingo during the nineteenth century.” “Jamaica has been a traditional place of refuge for exiles from Haiti, Santo Domingo . . . Jamaica has been a traditional Cuba.”<sup>26</sup> A member of the Jamaican planter class, Mrs. Alba mourns not only her husband’s death but the loss of a society that, in the play’s 1920s setting, was “on its way down.” Wynter reflects on this historical context at length in the introductory essay:

The plantocracy . . . started its slow decline with the British Sugar Duty Act of 1846 which repealed the special position of Jamaican sugar on the British market. A few landowners still hang on to their land and the remnant of their power, but it is all rather moth-eaten. The society suffers the stagnation of all colonies, but with the First World War come and gone, the beginnings of change hover on the horizon.<sup>27</sup>

Wynter’s reading links the putatively provincial settings of both plays to a larger world on the verge of upheaval—Spain on the verge of civil war and Jamaica on the brink of the anticolonial uprisings of the 1930s. Yet, Wynter’s version amplifies the social tensions of Lorca’s play by considering the intricacies of race, gender, and class. Whereas Lorca’s play concerns the conflict between the Alba daughters, here Mrs. Alba’s black servants hold center stage.

The opening scene focuses on an anonymous servant charged with the care of the house and the family’s possessions, vestiges of their old glory. She arranges a gilded mirror atop a heavy “mahogany chest in which [Mrs. Alba’s] daughters guard their hope. Like dead flowers pressed in a book,”<sup>28</sup> she muses. In this one-act version, Mrs. Alba and her daughters do not appear on stage. Instead their power is displayed through the maid’s subservient posture. The stage directions reveal that she spends much of the play “down on hands and knees shining the floor with a coconut brush,” and indeed, it is with this image that the play ends. Yet, although the servant “works and moves with the weariness of one who suffers from chronic malnutrition,” her mind is clear and her tongue is sharp. Through her eyes, and without a drop of nostalgia or sentimentality, the Albas’ decline is framed in stark economic terms. She observes, drily: “Another funeral. Another old family gone. Another planter pass

24 Federico García Lorca, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2005 [1936]), 66.

25 Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 48.

26 *Ibid.*, 49.

27 *Ibid.*, 49.

28 *Ibid.*, 53.

on without a son to come after to carry on the land. And the mortgage that the land stumble under.”<sup>29</sup>

This line encapsulates the change that is foreshadowed by Wynter’s addition of the word *land* in the title *The House and Land of Mrs. Alba*. The servant performs this expansion of space in a direct address to the audience: “This is Mrs. Alba’s house. . . . Outside is Mrs. Alba’s land. (*She gestures with a sweeping gesture.*) Everywhere your eye fall on. Every corn stalk, cane stalk, guinea grass blade! Hill and gully, ruinate and cultivate.”<sup>30</sup> While the beginning of this description seems to invoke nature, her use of the word *ruinate*, here an adjective, invokes a land that has been tampered with. The servant’s “*sweeping gesture*” does not merely encompass the stage. Transforming the rural landscape of the play, as well as the land beyond the theatre, the play makes a distinction between the land as an object to be possessed and nature as a source of sustenance. The plantation is not the Earth. Nevertheless, the servant’s use of the phrase “ruinate and cultivate” has dual implications. As Michelle Cliff notes, in Jamaican vernacular the adjective *ruinate* “signified the reclamation of land, the disruption of cultivation, civilization, by the uncontrolled, uncontrollable forest.”<sup>31</sup> *Ruinate* suggests, above all, a disruption of the “order of empire.” By imagining a land that is both *ruinate* and *cultivate*, Wynter marks a potential for anticolonial transformation in the ruins of the plantation, anticipating the disorderly transition from the colonial to the postcolonial era.

This opening scene foregrounds the play’s focus on the material and symbolic significance of land in pre-independence Jamaica, a theme that occupied much of Wynter’s early work. The play anticipates, for example, Wynter’s discussion of the “plantation-plot dichotomy” in her 1971 essay, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation”:

The plantation was run by the manager class, the colon<sup>32</sup> class. This class and the laboring indigenous class face each other across barricades that are in-built in the very system that created them. This is why the clash in 1865 and the clash in 1938 and the future clashes are unavoidable unless the system itself is transformed.<sup>33</sup>

In the “plot,” however, Wynter sees the possibility of resistance: “The planters gave the slaves plots of land on which to grow food to feed themselves in order to maximize profits. We suggest that this plot system, was, like the novel form in literature terms, the locus of resistance to the market system and market values.”<sup>34</sup> The plot, like the novel, emerged out of the very market system it came to resist. As Wynter elaborates in “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” “the history of folk-culture in Jamaica is the history of this ambivalent relation.”<sup>35</sup> By reclaiming the revolutionary potential of the Earth as “the centre of a core of beliefs and attitudes . . . the African presence . . . ‘*rehumanised Nature*’ and helped to save his own humanity against the constant onslaught of the

29 Ibid., 55.

30 Ibid., 53.

31 Michelle Cliff, “Caliban’s Daughter,” *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 3.3 (2003): 157.

32 Planter class.

33 Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou* 5 (1971): 99.

34 Ibid., 97.

35 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 36.



plantation system by the creation of a folklore and folk culture.”<sup>36</sup> Importantly, folklore “is not only the relation of Man to Nature but of Man to himself.”<sup>37</sup>

Central to Wynter’s analysis is a historical understanding of the connection among land, labor, and resistance, evident in her reference to two flashpoints: in 1865, hundreds of black peasants marched to the capital at Spanish Town. (In 1965, the Jamaican Labour Party commissioned Wynter to memorialize the Morant Bay uprising; her play *1865: Ballad for a Rebellion* was the result.) In the mid- to late 1930s, while the Spanish civil war raged across the sea, a string of labor rebellions erupted across the British West Indies, precipitating the fall of the plantocracy. In their connection among land, labor, and the black body, Wynter reads these acts of protest as connected to the processes of cultural resistance implied by *rehumanization*. “Folklore was the cultural guerilla resistance against the market economy.”<sup>38</sup>

In this process of *indigenization*, whereby man both “*adapted* himself to Nature and transformed Nature” one may locate Wynter’s alternative vision for a postcolonial public.<sup>39</sup> As Elizabeth Dillon observes, “indigenization, as Wynter describes it, is a process that works against the capitalist enclosure of the commons toward a moral economy of collective sustenance.”<sup>40</sup> Wynter’s vision for “a truly indigenous theatre” in the wake of Jamaica’s independence must be understood in this light. Theatre would not only help “project new Jamaican images”; it would also *perform* indigenization through embodied acts of ritual and resistance.<sup>41</sup> The result of this labor would be the re-creation of “a system in which the community and the society and the social order is primary.”<sup>42</sup> With interrelated terms such as *indigenization*, *rehumanization*, *reinterpretation*, and *adaptation*, Wynter provides a rich critical vocabulary of collective transformation. Crucially, theatrical adaptation quite literally enlivens the former terms by drawing upon the resources of performance.

A seed of this idea appears in the following exchange from the play:

Servant: They have land to mortgage. We have none.

Poncia: We have a hole in the ground. Six feet long.

Servant: The only land we’ll ever have.

Poncia: We have our hands. We can eat bread by the sweat of our brow.<sup>43</sup>

The play’s conflict does not lie in the fact that the peasants have no “land to mortgage,” but that they have been used as the “ox for the plough of the plantation system.”<sup>44</sup> On one hand, the play shows the body, the hands in particular, being instrumentalized for labor: stage directions include no less than ten references to vigorous floor polishing, interrupted only by a moment when the servant “puts a hand

36 Ibid., 36.

37 Ibid., 36.

38 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 36.

39 Ibid., 36. Emphasis mine.

40 Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World 1649–1849* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 205.

41 “First Novel Wins Acclaim.” Emphasis mine.

42 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 36.

43 Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 55.

44 Ibid., 35.

to her forehead and groans with a deep grievance.”<sup>45</sup> Yet Poncia’s reminder that “we have our hands. We can eat bread by the sweat of our brow” gestures toward the process of “adaptation-resistance” that Wynter locates in the “plot.” The *House and Land of Mrs. Alba* adds theatricality to the list of cultural processes that would help to refashion the black body’s relationship to the land. Significantly, the play depicts no heroic acts of rebellion. As Katherine McKittrick notes, “Wynter’s anticolonial vision is not . . . teleological—moving from colonial oppression outward and upward toward emancipation—but rather consists of knots of ideas and histories and narratives that can only be legible in relation to one another.”<sup>46</sup>

Although Wynter’s play shows her characters engaged in acts of adaptation, her introductory essay frames adaptation as a self-reflexive process of postcolonial reading that renders “knots of ideas and histories” legible by drawing upon the resources of dramaturgy and performance. Furthermore, Wynter’s claim that the point of theatrical adaptation was “not to translate the play from one language to another”<sup>47</sup> offers an occasion to reflect on the long-contested relationship between translation and adaptation. Wynter does not in fact discard translation as a critical and creative practice, but rather distinguishes her approach from both “realist” and “poetic” translations that “transfer Lorca’s plays into a world where English is spoken, but a world which exists in a vacuum.”<sup>48</sup> These productions had failed to make the play “live” because they had “merely put certain English phrases and sentences in the place of Spanish phrases and sentences.” Such an approach was in fact a “negation” of translation, leaving “audiences puzzled as to what all the fuss is about. What’s this Lorca kick? Is the immediate reaction of many a theatregoers [*sic*] after seeing an English version of any of the plays.”<sup>49</sup>

Wynter’s critiques invite an understanding of translation and adaptation as interrelated processes rather than points on a spectrum between fidelity and creative license. The context of theatre compels an understanding of translation and adaptation as processes performed in tandem. As Susan Knutson argues, out of the “terminological chaos making its way through translation and adaptation studies, one neologism worth keeping is *tradaptation*,”<sup>50</sup> a term coined by the Québécois playwright Michel Garneau. Against the assumption that “too much creativity” in translation prevents cultural exchange, Knutson argues that *tradaptation* “does permit cultural exchange, but it shapes it, with intentionality and transparency, so that those elements entering into the exchange are visibly and audibly the ones that artists have wished to bring onto the ‘stage.’”<sup>51</sup>

Although the term *tradaptation* spares us the dubious task of determining where translation ends and adaptation begins, Wynter’s use of *adaptation* already implies

45 Ibid., 55.

46 “Yours in the Intellectual Struggle: Sylvia Wynter and the Realization of the Living,” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

47 Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 49.

48 Ibid., 49.

49 Ibid., 49.

50 Susan Knutson, “‘Tradaptation’ Dans le Sens Québécois: A Word for the Future,” *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation*, ed. Laurence Raw (New York: Continuum, 2012), 112.

51 Ibid., 113.

distinct, self-reflexive strategies of linguistic and cultural translation. Reflecting upon her process, Wynter crafts the play along “modified Brechtian lines,” examining Lorca’s original “in order to identify the social, historical, and economic determinants of the characters and their society. I have then put the play back together in a Jamaican locale and period where the determinants are roughly equivalent to those of the original play.”<sup>52</sup> Wynter’s hyperbolic gesture of equivalence also undergirds her complaint that previous translations had failed to “transfer Lorca’s plays into an *equivalent* world where the language spoken is determined by *equivalent* conditions and circumstances.”<sup>53</sup> Yet this strategic exaggeration allows her to provocatively suggest that the peripheral space of “backwoods” Jamaica was a more ideal setting for a reinterpretation of Lorca’s drama. Her effort to “make correspondences clear” suggests a deliberate unveiling of historical, cultural, and linguistic connections between the Spanish and Jamaican settings, serving the political aim of emphasizing the historicity of putatively marginal spaces.

Wynter, therefore, suggests that adaptation as a dramaturgical practice requires careful reading, a sentiment that anticipates Gayatri Spivak’s claim that translation “is the most intimate act of reading.”<sup>54</sup> Wynter’s engagement with Brecht—a translation in itself—serves this project on two levels. It first propels a Marxist reading of Lorca’s original play: “In the 1930’s when Lorca wrote his plays, Spain was, in relation to the rest of Europe, a traditional underdeveloped country. . . . Yet the landowners were threatened with change, with industrialization, political democracy, the rise of Trade Unionism, Communism, Socialism, Republican and Anarchist ideas. . . . The crisis of the daughter’s lack of suitors is an economic crisis.”<sup>55</sup> In Wynter’s reading, Bernarda Alba is a “world historical individual” and the *pueblo* setting of Lorca’s play is connected to a world on the edge of tumultuous transition. Though Lorca would not live to see many of these changes, Wynter grants his work a certain prescience, attained “not through realist reportage but with a lightening poetic intuition.”<sup>56</sup>

More specifically, Wynter locates Lorca’s “poetic intuition” in his evocative use of the folk tradition. Writes Wynter, “Lorca was born in the South of Spain and grew up amidst a rich folk tradition. He took part in the investigation and research into the folk poetry and folk songs of Spain, and his plays recreated rhythms and cadences of speech familiar to the people. With this language he was able to deal with problems at once familiar and obscure. . . .”<sup>57</sup> According to Wynter, the historical insights afforded by Lorca’s use of the folk would not be unveiled by literal translations but rather by turning an altogether more elusive poetics of performance.

Wynter had hinted at this approach in a discussion of her earlier translation of Lorca’s *Yerma*:

I once read an English translation of *Yerma* and was impressed by its incongruity. England has no peasant society to correspond with Spain’s, and the whole thing had an

52 Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 49.

53 Ibid., 49.

54 Gayatri Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” *The Translation Studies Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 372.

55 Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 49.

56 Ibid., 49.

57 Ibid., 49.

air of falseness. In Jamaica we still have a small-holding society. I began to translate Yerma again, setting it among these people in almost any small village or town, and the transposition worked naturally, even to the evocative expressions of speech and the eld Spanish-style songs of the Maroons.<sup>58</sup>

Wynter's focus on folk culture links her to another translator of Lorca, Langston Hughes. During the Spanish civil war, Hughes translated the play *Bodas de Sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) into African American vernacular speech.<sup>59</sup> Wynter's approach to translation is ultimately more transformative, however, as her use of the word *transposition* indicates. Although the basic definition of *transpose* (to transfer from one place or context to another) indicates the shift in setting, its musical definition (to transfer or perform in a different key) provides insight into Wynter's more elusive aim of adapting Lorca's "evocative expressions" to the specific imperatives of the Jamaican context. To transpose the play was not to erase its original context but rather to leave behind traces of intersecting histories. In the "eld Spanish style songs of the Maroons," for example, one discerns Lorca's Spanish countryside, but also the legacy of Spanish colonialism in Jamaica and the patterns of resistance that sprung up within its coils.

As Wynter observed, the "maroons humanized their mountainous interior with adaptations of their own culture,"<sup>60</sup> and these transformative entanglements of land, folk culture, and embodied resistance drive her own approach to this adaptation. An excerpt from a "Jamaican Maroon folk song" frames her introductory essay. The refrain, "House an' land a buy fam'ly oh!" (one needs a house and land to "buy" family), is at once a lamentation and a critique.<sup>61</sup> This theme is extended in the play itself when an anonymous old beggar woman wanders into the house:

I did have a piece of land. Narrow but it  
 Long. And a man. And children to care  
 My old age. And a neighbor to give me good morning. To pass the time of day.  
 A breadfruit tree. Coco leaf. Fat in the  
 Rain. St Vincent and mosella yam. Til one day God lift his hand.<sup>62</sup>

In her monologue we hear "the elliptical qualities and cadences of the Jamaican dialect speech, a speech whose rhythms are still largely molded in the context of an oral tradition."<sup>63</sup> This "elliptical" style (in which some words are elided) enables an economy of speech, granting each individual image a distinct place in a poetics of land, labor, collectivity, and ultimately, loss.

Such lyricism, however, does not lull the spectator into passive acceptance of the folk as a static category, but rather compels a *reinterpretation* of folk identity as

58 Wynter, "Cleo Laine and Errol John in The Barren One," *Radio Times*, January 2, 1959, 39.

59 Langston Hughes, translator. *Blood Wedding and Yerma by Federico García Lorca*. New York: TCG Translations, 1994.

60 Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," 36.

61 "Essay and Play Extract," 48.

62 *Ibid.*, 54

63 *Ibid.*, 49.

mutable and historically contingent. The old woman’s nostalgic tone soon gives way to a searching meditation on change and human agency:

Old Woman: I never obtain my desire. I never find God to answer my question. And the answer that man give break my heart.

Servant: Die then. It’s easier.

Old Woman: No. Not til somewhere in the world I find a man to answer my question.

Servant: And if God can’t help you, is man you going turn to?

Old Woman: Only he I have. . . . Only he know my condition.<sup>64</sup>

In one respect, this exchange may be read as a reversal of the unquestioning religiosity prevalent in traditional (and arguably one-dimensional) representations of folk culture. By emphasizing the old woman’s turn to “man,” however, the play reframes her quest for understanding in collective terms, as a collaborative search for knowledge rooted in the desire for a transformative return to the land. Wynter’s investment in engaged spectatorship is implicit here: envisioning this alternate public requires a critical distance from the world of the play. Although the play’s colonial setting seemed to foreclose this transformation, the spectator—recognizing the unbearable “unreality of the so-called real”—is granted the ability to imagine otherwise.<sup>65</sup> Theatrical representation points the way, but the spectator has final say in the imagination of postcolonial futures.

Thus, Wynter’s enactment of a postcolonial public hinges not merely on national identification, but rather on a politics and poetics of alienation. Her engagement with Brecht’s theory of “alienation effects” helps to facilitate this aim. Designed to transform the spectator “from a general passive acceptance to a corresponding state of suspicious inquiry,” alienation effects involve self-reflexive reminders of the theatre’s status *as* theatre.<sup>66</sup> A variety of distancing techniques (such as characters addressing the audience directly) reveal the social world of the play to be constructed, and therefore, changeable. As Wynter observes, “theatre of the past . . . Brecht insists, with its accent on ‘naturalism’ is one of the venues which Man uses to *escape* the truth. The theatre then, in both production and writing, must seek to escape this flight to an illusion.”<sup>67</sup>

Brecht’s theory is usefully expanded by Daphne Brooks, whose theory of “Afro-alienation acts” points to the use of alterity as a strategy of black Atlantic performance: “Afro-alienation acts invoke largely anti-realist forms of cultural expression in order to call attention to the hegemony of identity categories. This strategy also provides a fruitful terrain for marginalized figures to experiment with culturally

64 *Ibid.*, 54–55.

65 Wynter, “A Little Culture,” 24.

66 Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” in *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 192.

67 Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 49. Wynter then quotes Brecht’s writing on realistic theatre and illusion: “the illusion created by the theatre must be a partial one, in order that it may be recognized as an illusion. Reality, however complete, has to be altered by being turned into art, so, that it can be seen as alterable and treated as such. . . . We want to alter the nature of our social life” (“On the Mother Courage Model,” *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 219, quoted in Wynter, “Essay and Play Extract,” 50.)

innovative ways to critique and to disassemble the condition of oppression.”<sup>68</sup> Reflecting the specific “traumas of self-fragmentation” resulting from centuries of oppression, it also manifests the “counter-normative tactics” used by the marginalized to turn trauma into “dissonantly enlightened performance.”<sup>69</sup>

Alienation thus compels both performer and spectator to adopt the questioning role central to Wynter’s theory of reinterpretation. As Wynter notes, “society too must be seen in the context of the forces which keeps [sic] it in motion. The alienation effects which Brecht advises then, tend to this particular purpose. To go behind the apparent surface of windmills to the deeper truth which lies behind.”<sup>70</sup> These ideas serve as foundation for the changes in Wynter’s adaptation, in which “the social relationships of the characters, magnificently brought out by Lorca, have been made more explicit.”<sup>71</sup> To this end, the play opens with a scathing monologue by the anonymous servant, in which she directly addresses, or rather accuses, the audience:

I am Mrs. Alba’s servant. You see me often enough in my cap and apron. Or like this in my few rags when I clean. But as far as you are concerned you don’t see me. You see a servant. You don’t know my name. As far as you are concerned I don’t need one. I am a servant and my name lies in my purpose. To serve Mrs. Alba’s house, attend her gods. And when I die manure her land.<sup>72</sup>

The servant’s words are jarring for several reasons, not the least of which is her insistence that the audience is complicit in her erasure. Her comment on the audience’s blindness, “You don’t see me,” is reminiscent of the narrator’s opening address to the reader in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, anticipating Wynter’s reflection on that text in “The Eye of the Other: Images of the Black in Spanish Literature.”<sup>73</sup> On stage, the enunciation serves to emphasize the limitations of spectatorship and to disrupt faith in theatre’s ability to project truth. The audience’s ability to perceive the world of the play is mediated by social experience. The audience is part of the power structures that oppress her. Just as the servant is invisible, she is also anonymous in the play as well as in the script itself. Her declaration that her final purpose will be to “manure [Mrs. Alba’s] land” is a morbid reminder of the way black life, and indeed death, is instrumentalized to serve the needs of capital.

68 Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

69 *Ibid.*, 4.

70 Wynter, “Essay and Play Abstract,” 51.

71 *Ibid.*, 51.

72 *Ibid.*, 53.

73 “The Eye of the Other: Images of the Black in Spanish Literature,” *Blacks in Hispanic Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. Miriam DeCosta-Willis, (New York: Kennikat Press, 1977), 1–17.

Although Wynter critiques the servant's objectification, she does not depict the servant breaking free of the structures that bind her. On the contrary, at the end of this monologue, the servant *assumes* the very role implied by the statement: “I am a servant and my name lies in my purpose.”<sup>74</sup> At the end of the monologue, she kneels to shine the floor and remains in this posture for the remainder of the act. There are no less than ten stage directions directing the servant to reapply wax to her brush, and over time the gesture becomes increasingly mechanical to the point of achieving a stylized estrangement from its original purpose. Yet, this is precisely the point: we are encouraged to see it *as a performance*. The servant performs servitude—and reflects upon that performance—thereby denaturalizing that role and revealing the mechanisms that structure it. Like the hope chest and gilded mirror that represent Mrs. Alba's power, the “cap and apron” and “few rags” that symbolize the servant's abjection are revealed to be props: none of these symbols suggests a natural order. By calling attention to our blindness, the actor-as-servant compels us to see differently.

As Wynter contends in a section titled “A Suggestion about Sets,” props and physical space also supply opportunities for the use of alienation effects. In Lorca's original play, as its title suggests, the house itself becomes a force in the oppression of the Alba women, with both the dialogue and stage direction including multiple references to thick walls, (*muros gruesos*) heavy, locked doors, and barred windows. The play's overall sense of claustrophobia is heightened by the growing turmoil inside the house. Although Wynter's version contains this constricting sense, she notes that the objects “must be shown to be made and manipulated by the human beings in the first place.” A gilded rococo mirror, an object of “veneration” for the Alba family, would be shown to be insubstantial: “Instead of a real mirror, a painting of such a mirror and a stand on which to hang the mirror are seen for what they are.” The large portrait of the late Don Bernardo would also be “a painting of a painting . . . in the manner of a modern painting which makes use of real discarded objects stuck on canvas.” In the portrait, the “gun with which Don Bernardo defended his power and wealth in Santo Domingo” is portrayed by an “outsize papier-mâché play gun.” Although the objects are “more solid than the people, although they are supposed to represent the solidity of the objects of those whose wealth and power come from the land, one must at the same time show that they are created by man; and received their value from the value he attaches to them.” Such an emphasis on the artificiality of these props exposes the tenuous ground upon which the Albas built their power.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, these physical and ideological props structure reality in ways that have devastating material effects. Intersections of color, class, and visibility structure the play's social world. As Wynter notes, “pride of caste in the original play is made more complex by pride of colour in the Jamaican context.”<sup>76</sup> A list of characters suggests these hierarchies: The nameless servant is “Thin. Black.” Poncia, the head servant, is “Sambo colour.” Bernarda Alba is “White with some admixture of Negro. Harsh weather-beaten face of the tropical plantocracy.” There are three old women, who “range between white and near white in the familiar Caribbean spectrum of

74 Wynter, “Essay and Play Abstract,” 53.

75 *Ibid.*, 53.

76 *Ibid.*, 50.

shades.” Three young women are “somewhat darker shades than the old ladies but managing to appear white with powder.”<sup>77</sup>

These descriptions not only encapsulate Jamaica’s history of racial mixing but also suggest a racial indeterminacy. Whiteness is shown to be particularly unstable. The descriptions of women who are “near white,” “white with some admixture of Negro,” and most notably, “managing to appear white with powder,” suggest the tenuous nature of racial purity on which the plantocracy built their power. Racial identity, too, is a performance. Although the spectators perceive a “spectrum of shades,” they are unable to fix racial identity with any definitive accuracy.<sup>78</sup> This destabilized racial taxonomy points toward a different conceptualization of citizenship. All of these people “are joined together by a common landscape, speech, country, by a common set of historical circumstances. By the personal tragedies that afflict us through our acceptance of these circumstances. Our fear of examining them. Our refusal to change them.”<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, the play does not synthesize these relationships into a triumphant vision of national solidarity. Rather, it lingers on the paradoxical legacies of colonialism embedded in national memory. Perhaps the most striking example of this occurs toward the end of the act, when, in one of the play’s most disorienting moments, the head servant Poncia places a record onto a gramophone. With the ease of a task performed many times, Poncia plays “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary,” a British anthem first recorded in 1914 and popularized during World War I. The anthem frames Poncia’s memory of the war’s effect on social relations in Jamaica:

Poncia comes up on to the living room, takes out a small table, and a small old fashioned gramophone which she puts on the table, winds, opens, and puts the needle on the record. The record is cracked. It plays, but not too loudly soldier’s [sic] voices singing “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary.”<sup>80</sup>

Moving beyond music as narrative device, Wynter uses sound technology to produce the play’s final alienation effect. It is significant that the music emanates from a gramophone, not from the voices of the actors or from a disembodied source offstage. A shift in lighting serves to focalize the unveiling of this prop, previously not visible on stage. The foregrounding of sound technology jarringly revises conventional representations of the folk as disconnected from technological modernity. Although it is unsurprising that Mrs. Alba would own a gramophone (by the 1920s the devices were becoming popular and could often be seen in the parlors of the elite), it is significant that Poncia, her “sambo-colored” servant, uses the gramophone to set the tone for her own performance. Upsetting the trope of a premodern folk, the scene reinforces instead a sense of contemporaneity—restoring Poncia’s status as a historical subject.

Just as technology mediates the past, Poncia’s monologue does not merely transmit cultural memory, but rather shapes it. As the song plays in the background,

77 *Ibid.*, 52.

78 *Ibid.*, 52.

79 *Ibid.*, 52.

80 *Ibid.*, 56.



we imagine that it was a rallying cry played in countless parlors in years past. It is not a traditional battle song, but rather a song of nostalgia for home. It charts the distance between London locales such as Picadilly and Leceister Square (where the streets were “paved with gold”) to the town of Tipperary in Ireland (where the singer’s sweetheart resides). Poncia’s commentary clashes sharply with the song’s sentimental nostalgia. Deepening the play’s critique of the planter class, Poncia intones, “Which of their sons don’t run away from the land and the mortgage that the land carry like a hamper on its back? Which of them don’t go away to England these days and never set a foot back?”<sup>81</sup> By characterizing the planters as deserters rather than war heroes, Poncia also suggests a misplaced allegiance to the British flag and a lack of commitment to nation building at home. Through this lens, the song’s refrain assumes a bitter irony: If it was a long way to Tipperary, it was certainly an even longer way to Kingston.

Through the use of sound and spectacle, the glories of war and the allure of the colonial myth are held up to critique. As Poncia recalls phases of the war, her words become stylized, appearing as poetic stanzas in the script:

The day that they left  
 The band played on . . .  
 The Gleaner newspaper  
 Praised them as heroes  
 The young ladies waved them off  
 From the wharf  
 Their fiancés were off  
 To the wars  
 Glory filled their yes  
 With salt!<sup>82</sup>

At this moment, as if conjured by Poncia’s words, “three young ladies dressed in 1914 styles, finery and fluttering ribbons from their hats run gaily into the living room area. . . . They wave the Union Jacks then flutter it like a handkerchief at a departing ship. The music plays on.”<sup>83</sup> The women enact her words through their gestures. They wave the Union Jacks patriotically, then later “determined they would do their part to keep the home fires burning”; the women roll the flags into bandages for the wounded: “the young ladies rip their Union Jacks in two, then roll them into bandages.” When news of fallen soldiers arrives via telegram, they use the torn flags as handkerchiefs to dry their tears. Finally, “the young ladies take out framed photographs of young soldiers from their bags. They are draped in black crepe.”<sup>84</sup> The ladies then dust the photographs with the Union Jacks, completing the scene’s movement from hopeful allegiance to bitter disillusionment. With this sentimental climax, the scene nearly ascends to melodrama, yet identification is held at bay by a sense of artifice. As these are the same young ladies whose faces “[appear] white with the use of powder,” we are invited to see the connection between their

81 Ibid., 56.

82 Ibid., 56.

83 Ibid., 56.

84 Ibid., 56.

performance of whiteness and their nostalgia for a waning colonial past. Neither provides protection from modernity's violence, transmitted to the "backwoods island of Jamaica" by a triad of technologies—the gramophone, the telegram, and the photograph.

The final stanza of her monologue brings Poncia's anticolonial critique full circle:

How many of the young gentlemen  
Went off to fight  
For King and country  
To keep the world map  
Red with blood  
To guard the land?  
How many of the young gentlemen  
Stayed on  
Under the mud.<sup>85</sup>

With the striking image of the "world map/Red with blood," Poncia connects the imperial geographies of war to the social world of the play. As Wynter notes, through Poncia "we establish the history of the economic and social forces in which the Alba family now finds itself enmeshed."<sup>86</sup> Yet throughout this dramatization, this play within a play, the anonymous servant (Poncia's assistant) has continued her scrubbing. In this posture of indifference to the spectacle around her, she silently emphasizes the distance between the planter's disillusionment and the realities of land and labor on the island that still need attending to. She closes the play in the same posture in which she began: "The servant is squatting back on her heels. Rubbing wax on her brush."<sup>87</sup>

This final scene thus performs both physical labor and the labor of historical reinterpretation, exposing the colonial myth and its ongoing material consequences. Importantly, the spectator is suspended in a state of irresolution; a consequence of the play's content as well its one-act format. Yet as Wynter explains, "the actions themselves explore and throw light on the relationships not only in the microcosm of Mrs. Alba's house, nor in that of the island, but in the larger concept of the change over from an agricultural to industrialized society, from the value system that springs from the ownership of money."<sup>88</sup> By exposing the historical underpinnings of "forces that are imagined to play the part of fate," the play models the conceptual transformation that Wynter theorizes throughout her early work.

Conceived in the politically feverish climate of 1960s Jamaica, Wynter's adaptation and her other writings for *Jamaica Journal* contribute to the urgent project of defining a postcolonial public. Central to this project is an understanding of the postcolonial moment not as radical rupture, but rather as continuous with the recent colonial past. Wynter reflects upon this early work in an interview with David Scott:

I had become very interested in the idea of how you create a superstructure, of how you can induce a sense of solidarity, of continuity. So the decision to borrow the name of *Jamaica*

85 Ibid., 56.

86 Ibid., 51.

87 Ibid., 56.

88 Ibid., 51.

*Journal* from an earlier planter class journal was deliberate on my part. The idea was that you're going to keep a continuity with the past, but you are going at the same time to transform the conception of that past. So that was how the journal came together.<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, *Jamaica Journal's* inaugural issues had attempted to explicitly name and address a recently formed postcolonial reading public. Noting the journal's status as a periodical of the colonial-era Institute of Jamaica, Frank Hill, chairman of the Board of Governors, offered this prefatory statement: “The aims of the institute have obviously changed since the foundation in 1879. . . . What has changed most of all is the public for whom that Institute has to cater.”<sup>90</sup> Not for the exclusive consumption of “old genteel ladies and gentlemen” nor for an aspiring middle class, the journal would be “for all Jamaicans”: “We give now school children and office clerks, the aspiring middle class and even the same planters, service when they require it; and one of the services is ‘Jamaica Journal.’”<sup>91</sup> Such a prefatory statement performs what Brent Hayes Edwards has named a *framing gesture*. As a strategy of black diasporic cultural production, the framing gesture goes beyond “positioning, delimiting, or extending its range of application; articulating it in relationship to a discursive field; to a variety of derived or opposed signifiers . . . fleshing out its history of use; and imagining its scope of application; its ‘future.’”<sup>92</sup>

*The House and Land of Mrs. Alba* approaches the “future” of Jamaica's postcolonial public with provocative nuance. Just as the *Hills of Hebron* was an “anticolonial not a nationalist novel,”<sup>93</sup> the play eschews facile solidarity in favor of a process of *articulation*, in Stuart Hall's sense of making a “unity out of different elements, under certain conditions.”<sup>94</sup> Embarking on a similar political labor in her first essay for *Jamaica Journal*, Wynter had posed the question “What is a Jamaican? We are Jamaicans but who are ‘we’?”<sup>95</sup> Wynter later remarked, “I wanted us to assume our past: slaves, slave masters and all. And then, *reconceptualize* that past. . . . I didn't want us to go for what I call a cheap and easy radicalism.”<sup>96</sup> With its focus on intimacy, embodiment, and everchanging performances of social life, theatre provides a fertile ground for this reconceptualization. The creative and critical merge in Wynter's use of adaptation, allowing her to reinterpret, and indeed to perform, the past.

89 David Scott, “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 147.

90 Frank Hill, “Chairman's Message,” *Jamaica Journal* 1.1 (December 1968): 2.

91 *Ibid.*, 2.

92 Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 38.

93 Wynter, quoted in Anthony Bogues, “Introduction,” *The Hills of Hebron*, by Sylvia Wynter, 1962, Reprint (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2010), xi.

94 Stuart Hall, “On Postmodernism and Articulation,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10.2 (1986): 53.

95 Wynter, “Lady Nugent's Journal,” *Jamaica Journal* 1.1 (1969): 24. [Emphasis mine.]

96 “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism,” 148.