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Frieda Cassin's *With Silent Tread* and the Specter of Leprosy in Antigua and Britain 1889-91

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In August 1890 the *Antigua Observer* described leprosy as “the question of the moment” and anticipated the prompt proposal of legislation to effect the “compulsory segregation of those afflicted with the disease.”¹ Dr. John Freeland, a government medical officer, estimated that there were then fifty-three lepers in Antigua. Twelve men and nineteen women among them lived in the leper asylum; in 1875 the asylum had had eleven male and nine female inmates (3). A global panic about leprosy had been galvanized in particular by the death in 1889 of Father Damien de Veuster, a missionary priest, at the leper asylum at Molokai in Hawaii. In Frieda Cassin's *With Silent Tread* (1890) it is leprosy that stalks the heroine Morea Latrobe, that “sometimes openly, but more often in secret, invades the circles of West Indian families” (Cassin 35). *With Silent Tread*, thought to be “the earliest novel of Antigua and Barbuda” (Gilmore vi), was edited by Evelyn O'Callaghan and republished in 2002 as the lead title of Macmillan's Caribbean Classics series. Cassin, an Antiguan creole, also founded in 1895 a literary journal *The Carib* that ran to six issues.² In this paper I read *With Silent Tread* in relation to the panic over leprosy in Antigua and Britain in 1889-91, turning to a wider range of contemporary materials than O'Callaghan. I address, in particular, the stakes of Cassin's engagement with debates over the contagiousness of leprosy (Hansen's disease) and the means of infection, and the figuring of colonial/British relations in those debates. The renewed panic over leprosy was organized largely around fears of global disease networks created by colonization, imperial trade, travel and migration and a push for the segregation of lepers. Cassin supports segregation—a contentious public health measure—and fleshes out those fears of disease transmission between racial communities in empire and of transmissibility back to Britain. The thematics of segregation, insularity and contamination are played out more critically in studies of the characters and situations of women as they negotiate the dynamics of gender and class in a racialized plantation culture.

Zachary Gussow writes of the 1889-91 panic:

More and more real and alleged cases of leprosy were being reported from abroad, and more and more stations within the colonial orbit were becoming agitated about whether leprosy was, in fact, already present among them—and, if so, whether it was also increasing locally, as was being reported elsewhere. At the same time, more and more information about the disease, its presence, and its spread was being disseminated worldwide. Opinions, rates and estimates varied, but the alarmist consensus of the time was that the disease was steadily increasing and, in fact, was about to become pandemic.

The fear, of course, was that the disease would spread to the centers of Western civilization. (113)

British people expressed fear that leprosy was in danger of “coming home” from the colonies (Robertson). The *Times* reported, for instance, on 14 January 1890, the Prince of Wales' hope that National Leprosy Fund monies would not become “the means of inducing impoverished lepers to come to us from other countries and to spread the disease among us.”

Historians of leprosy often cite the work of minister Henry Wright as representative of the “Imperial Danger” thesis. Sheldon Watts, for instance, summarizes Wright’s argument in *Leprosy and Its Story: Segregation and Its Remedy* (1885):

“loathsome” leprosy, long thought to be extinct among civilized beings, was in India “eat[ing] into the nerve-tissues of [England’s] people.” Looking to the near future when he thought many of his nation would be settled in India, Wright predicted that travel back and forth would bring the terrible disease to England’s own “closely packed population.” (40)

Jo Robertson analyses Wright’s use in *Leprosy: An Imperial Danger* (1889) of a seed/soil metaphor that dominated nineteenth-century accounts of leprosy:

the leper as a breeding ground for leprosy became the disease ... He suggested that lepers might “fertilize” the soil with “their bacilli and spores,” contaminating a district “for a period more or less lengthy.” Consequently, if a person lived where lepers lived, even if they did not come into “close proximity,” there was always the possibility that “you may be attacked by the disease, and that in a very short period.” Eventually, in Wright’s rhetoric, an attack from the disease leprosy becomes a “leper attack.” ... It was communicated between “races,” and was a threat to the “white races.” ... [T]he yellow and black races were more susceptible than the white; although some races presented an “aptitude for maturing the leprous agent,” none “can claim absolute immunity;” it was caught from colored men and slaves who had been given responsibility for caring for one’s children. (28-29)

In an 1890 tract *The Dreadful Revival of Leprosy*, Sir Morell Mackenzie, M.D. complained of a “free trade” in the disease (620) that had, in his view, emanated from a report on leprosy in British colonies prepared by the Royal College of Physicians; he urgently demanded suppression of the commerce. The report of the Royal College of Physicians, completed in 1863, was published in 1867. A key finding was that:

[t]he all-but unanimous conviction of the most experienced observers in different parts of the world is quite opposed to the belief that leprosy is contagious or communicable by proximity or contact with the diseased. The evidence derived from the experience of the attendants in leper asylums is especially conclusive on this point. (qtd. in Mackenzie 618)

The report of the Royal College of Physicians ruled “that there was ‘no evidence that ... would justify any measures for the compulsory segregation of lepers’” (qtd. in Gussow and Tracy 434). As a result in 1863 the Colonial Office circularized:

the Governors of all Her Majesty's Colonies, expressing an opinion that any laws affecting the personal liberty of lepers ought to be repealed; and that in the meantime, or, if they shall not be repealed, any action of the Executive Authority in enforcement of them, which is merely authorized and not enjoined by the law, ought to cease. (qtd. in Gussow and Tracy 434)³

Father Damien had contracted leprosy in 1874-5 through his work with lepers, providing seeming evidence of the communicability of the disease by causes other than hereditary transmission. His death from leprosy in 1889 focused growing public and medical concern about the communicability of leprosy, of which new evidence such as possible transmission through arm-to-arm smallpox vaccination had been emerging.

Established as a memorial to Father Damien in Britain in 1889, the National Leprosy Fund commissioned a report on leprosy in India and measures for the control of the disease. The Commission reported in 1891. A Special Committee of the National Leprosy Fund that "reviewed" the report helped shift worldwide medical opinion markedly in favor of compulsory segregation of lepers (Gussow and Tracy 434). Gussow and George Tracy outline the key findings of the Commission and the Special Committee:

[The Committee's] *Report* ... irrevocably dismissed the ideas of heredity, but considered that although "... in a scientific classification of diseases leprosy must be regarded as contagious and also inoculable, yet the extent to which it is propagated by these means is exceedingly small." A Special Committee of the National Leprosy Fund was appointed to review the conclusions and recommendations of the *Report*. In a strongly worded dissenting opinion, they specifically disagreed with the above conclusions, holding, instead, to a much tougher line on contagion. Further, they strongly objected to the *Report's* adverse recommendations regarding compulsory segregation, either complete or partial. (435)⁴

In Mackenzie's medical mapping of the globe leprosy is represented as being "indigenous" in British colonies:

Leprosy has before now overrun Europe and invaded England, without respecting the "silver streak" which keeps off other enemies; and it perfectly conceivable that it may do so again. It is well known that, in recent years, our countrymen whose lot is cast in places where the disease is indigenous have ceased to show the immunity from its attacks which was once thought to be their privilege. (614)

Using the language of Gothic, he writes "that leprosy still walks the earth in all its original hideousness" (608). His mapping signally fails to acknowledge that, as Watts trenchantly points out more generally, European imperial expansion had "[a]mong its unintended consequences ... the creation of disease networks which ... spanned the world. Before Columbus's fateful

crossing of the Atlantic in 1492, none of ... [such] epidemic diseases” as “bubonic plague, leprosy, smallpox, cholera, malaria, yellow fever or venereal syphilis (as opposed to yaws) had existed in the New World” (xiv). The introduction of smallpox, in particular, would decimate indigenous populations in the Americas.

In August 1890 Dr. John Freeland, who practiced in Antigua, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Lazaretto*, published in St Kitts, in which, drawing on the authority of thirty-nine years of medical practice in the Americas, he made a statement about the transmission of leprosy and recommended courses of action designed “in some measure” to contain its “spread” (3). The letter was reprinted in the *Antigua Observer* of 28 August 1890. In his account of leprosy in Antigua being “hereditary, as well as communicable,” the soil is a “*Leprous country*,” and the seeds are heredity, “*lengthened contact* ... such as living together, eating together, and sleeping together for years, or months,” careless medical process in “the system of arm to arm vaccination” for smallpox, and poor nutrition among the “labouring population.” Freeland insisted that leprosy “is not however at all contagious in the true sense of the word so that the mere touch or momentary contact need be dreaded.” He continued, “[*L*]engthened contact ... will *there* unquestionably help to propagate the disease although it is most remarkable that even under these last conditions Leprosy is very slightly if at all communicable *where it is not endemic*” (3). His principal recommendations concern compulsory segregation of lepers in the local asylum (established in 1838), strict enforcement of segregation, and medical treatment at the asylum; he also urges greater vigilance in relation to smallpox vaccination practices among doctors, and the adoption of measures to improve the diets of the laboring poor.⁵ In particular, he suggests that “every encouragement [be] given to increase the cultivation of native provisions, as well as fresh and wholesome vegetables.” Freeland explains:

We have it is true an Asylum for our Lepers built upon a rock or promontory, which the most fastidious might consider sufficiently isolated but alas there is no law to compel the summary removal of these people to its shelter, neither is there any force exerted to prevent the inmates from temporary [sic] leaving its precincts and wandering about the towns and villages for days and nights under the pretence of gathering materials for the manufacture of baskets, which they are allowed to publicly offer for sale. And further, there is no rule to restrain these loathsome but freeborn subjects of Her Britannic Majesty from absenting themselves for a week, or ten days at a time, and begetting children. (3)

The trade and commerce of incarcerated lepers to support themselves and sexual contact with a wider community would be curtailed under his proposals. The formulations exhibit a contemporary representational pattern noted by Robertson: lepers “depicted as interchangeable with the bacteria” (29). She gives the example of alarmist reports from India that lepers were “uncontrolled and uncontrollably spreading germs by sitting on iron railings outside a school attended by European children, selling fruit, and contaminating the wells of the city.” Today leprosy is understood not to be contagious. The World Health Organization points out that the

leprosy bacillus “is transmitted via droplets, from the nose and mouth, during close and frequent contacts with untreated cases.” Leprosy is treatable with drugs available free to sufferers; it is “[t]he age-old stigma associated with the disease” which “remains an obstacle to self-reporting and early treatment.”

On 8 November 1890 the *Antigua Standard* published a local Leeward Islands “petition to Queen Victoria ... with an invitation for residents to sign” (O’Callaghan, Introduction 20). A shift in the balance of medical opinion in favor of compulsory segregation is reported there, as conclusive proof that “compulsory segregation” is the “only method of successfully dealing with the disease” (qtd. 20). The petition begs that, “petitioners and others may be relieved from the ever present fear and risk of contracting this foul and horrible disease” (qtd. 20).

The first vignette which opens *With Silent Tread*, “A Picture,” dramatizes the toddler Morea Latrobe’s momentary rather than lengthened contact with “ole Pete” (36), whose disease has reached a very advanced stage. None of the black characters have last names. Cassin writes of Pete in her fourth paragraph:

Here was an object to excite universal pity and disgust. Were the pity not so plentifully mingled with disgust, the existence of such afflicted ones might be made less miserable among their fellow-men; were the disgust not so unwisely mingled with pity, these unhappy beings might be peacefully segregated from repulsion and temptation. (35)

Pete had been a “faithful” servant of the Latrobe family for “nine year” (36), a coachman, but was summarily dismissed by Morea’s mother Agnes when he sickened with leprosy. Desmond Nicholson observes that in the post-slavery period planters “no longer felt responsible for the care of the sick, young, old and those unable to work” (qtd. in O’Callaghan, Introduction 10).⁶ Destitute, with no family left to care for him, Pete begs money of his former mistress on a “hot dusty road” (35). Mrs Latrobe refuses to recognise the claim based on service and categorises him as a “beggar,” an identity he resists in disgust. She orders her new coachman to “Drive on;” Pete tries to reach “into the carriage to touch the unflinching form of its occupant” (36), and is whipped away by the coachman. Three of Mrs. Latrobe’s daughters are walking home, two in the charge of “stout elderly Negro nurse” Mammy Doodle; “rosy”-lipped three-year old Morea is superintended by “a young nurse-girl” Scintilia. In retaliation towards the mother Pete picks up Morea: “he kissed the soft mouth and dimpled cheeks again, and again, and rubbed his mutilated features against her flower-face” (37). The incident, which the fearful Scintilia, Sinty for short, does not report to her mistress, is literally a “leper attack.” The botanical metaphor is pollination. The seeds of the disease lie dormant in the soil of Morea’s body.

Cassin, whose novel was printed locally in Antigua, “presumably for the author” (O’Callaghan, Introduction 7), highlights means by which leprosy might be transferred from the

colonies to Britain: the unwitting colonial tourist (Morea), aware that her local horizons leave her “childish and undeveloped,” and wanting “to hop out and see the world” (120); the exchange of women between colonial and British families in marriage; possibly the colonial student in Europe for a liberal education; the “gaities and dissipations” associated with the annual fortnightly sojourn of “the Fleet and the Training Squadron” (58). In England on the day Morea tries on her bridal dress the news that she has contracted leprosy is broken to her. Her symptoms—“inflamed nostrils and swollen lips and a generally bloated and dissipated appearance” (155)—O’Callaghan observes, are “racialized” as dark (“Settling” 184). A British medical specialist Dr Norman pronounces: “The contemplated marriage must not be allowed to take place” (159). The colonial student, unnamed, is colored. His father has scraped together money for his education abroad in a country in which racism will weigh less heavily on him, in which would be able to mix more freely with liberal-minded students and “English families” (105). How and when he and Pete became infected is not of narrative interest to Cassin. He will marry Morea’s sister Thekla and the mixed-race couple will face ostracism. While Pete’s kiss of Morea in anger that transmits leprosy is representable in the novel, the colored man’s romantic and sexual intimacies with his wife that might also in Cassin’s model of contagion infect her cannot be hinted at.

The scene in which Morea struggles to come to terms with the implications of her disease is staged by Cassin as a pointed contrast to Pete’s infection of her after having been left “a huddled heap in the dust” (36). Morea understands that leprosy enjoins a code of honor based on white Creole experience—“separation” in “suffering, loneliness, death” (160). She locks herself apart from fiancé Selwyn Aird and the “comfort” of his protective embrace, “sink[ing] on her knees against the door” in grief, uttering the sentence “Dust to dust, ashes to ashes” (161), and shortly after arranging her self-segregation in England as she cannot “eat” or “sleep” in the Aird home, and fears madness (162). The scene is staged as a test of true character and maturity.

When news of Morea’s contraction of leprosy reaches the West Indies Scintilia confesses the cause of the infection to Mrs. Latrobe, who realizes that Morea is punished “[f]or the sins of the Mothers” (166), for the plentiful disgust which takes the place of womanly solicitude for Pete. Of Morea, Mrs. Latrobe now says, “Morea is dead,—she now exists only to suffer” (166). Morbidity consumes the leper’s human identity. Mrs. Latrobe calls leprosy “death in life” (166). In a piece of heavy-handed irony Scintilia and Eliza persuade Morea that Pete is a mere apparition, a “Jumby-man.” Eliza tries initially to frighten Morea into silence with “Ef Missy tell ... Big black jumby will come catch Missy in de night an’ nyam her up” (39). Cassin uses the power of presentiments of various kinds to underpin her theme of persuasion and to persuade her readers of the need for compulsory segregation of lepers. Mrs. Latrobe tends the dying and segregated Morea in England, a penance for her failure of benevolence and for her relinquishment of her maternal role to black nurses. Mrs. Latrobe herself develops leprosy through the nursing contact, and returns to her West Indian home, recognisably Antigua, to be cared for by her estranged eldest daughter Thekla. Her relinquishment of herself to Thekla’s care

is a penance for her sins against her: casting her off when she married the educated colored man; and only having offered when Thekla had appealed for familial "support" after her husband developed leprosy to "take" her daughter "back" (167).

The second vignette, "Another Picture," is set in the English seaside town of Deal, giving scope for an allusion to Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion* that underlines the thematic of persuasion in "A Picture." Morea's cousin nine- or ten-year-old Marion (Min) Aird has an accident when she is persuaded to jump from the seawall at Deal. While thinking she is too delicate as a girl to manage the feat, she is taunted by boys to show that gendered and stereotypically English quality "pluck" (40). The boys dare her cousin Selwyn Aird to prove his masculinity by ordering her to jump. She jumps out of "slav[ish]" devotion to him (40); her elder cousin Elizabeth, a member of a nursing order, rescripts Min's loyalty as being a "great goose" (43). "The two are united," O'Callaghan observes, "in an English code of honor, when each tries to take the blame for the injury which results from the incident" (Introduction 23). "Another Picture" replays the scene in *Persuasion* in which Louisa Musgrove, persuaded by high spirits and flirtation with Captain Wentworth, jumps from the seawall in Lyme Regis, seriously injuring herself. Austen addresses the question of responsibility for the accident, explicitly using the concept of persuasion.

Cassin's allusion to *Persuasion* invites an intenser, more cohesive reading of "A Picture." Mrs. Latrobe is persuaded to mistreat Pete by disgust and placing him beyond the bounds of her sympathy as a beggar. Pete is persuaded to infect Morea by "blind rage" and "fiendish triumph" (37). Scintilia is persuaded to keep the incident secret by a conversation with her acquaintance Eliza, who warns her of dire punishment for her negligence while tending a white child. Eliza is persuaded that plans to segregate black *and* white lepers should be enacted quickly before everyone on the island is infected. This alarmist sentiment is the coda to "A Picture." While criticizing Mrs. Latrobe's failures of humanity in relation to Pete and Thekla's husband, Cassin has been persuaded to endorse an alarmist view of the contagiousness of leprosy. Historical hindsight suggests that a leper in Pete's condition was not infectious. Watts notes:

In the 1920s, clinical technology revealed that lepromatous leprosy went through three stages. ... Only during its third and final stage when the victim was no longer infective (and had thus become a 'burnt-out case') did the leper acquire the collapsed nose, claw-like remains of feet and hands and other gruesome features of lepromatous leprosy. (43)

Pete was in this stage.

The name of the Latrobe family estate Cane Garden acts a marker of the historical formation of the elite white Creole family. Sugar, as Ileana Rodríguez observes, "as regional representation, the product as island, is the seat of value of this social group; it is what makes white white ... it is the object of exchange that sustains lineage, ethnic biography, blood" (121).

Thekla's colored husband is not welcome on the estate. Cassin invokes, too, in the idea of the garden a stock image of the West Indies as a cornucopia, subjecting it to stringent irony. A fine instance of the image is the frontispiece to the second edition of Robert Nugent Dunbar's *Beauties of Tropical Scenery; Lyrical Sketches, and Love-Songs* (1864). The image, designed by F. Gilbert, shows a young white woman with bared left breast standing beside a cornucopia of fruit and vegetables and draping over it a trail of flowers. Marina Warner suggests that European artists have used the "bare breast" iconographically to symbolize "the female body's bounty and its ardour" (293). The centerpiece of the Latrobe family dining table is fruit arranged in a display of "fantastic beauty" (54) and the meals are lavish, often exotic to English tastes. Visiting the family, Marion Aird, Mrs. Latrobe's niece, Morea's cousin, finds her first view of canefields to be of "intoxicating beauty" (63). The narrator notes that it is "intoxicating ... to an English eye enjoying them for the first time" (63). Marion learns that there are "silent undercurrents" of danger (102).

One danger against which Cassin shows white families guarding their table is leprosy. Merribell Browncave explains to Marion that she "dare" not buy fruit cultivated by "a family of lepers" or the "fowls" they raise, as they "use bread poultices on their sores, they throw them away afterwards—the fowls wander about and fatten on whatever they can find,—there, the suggestion is sufficiently disgusting" (113-114). The family is "almost starving, I am afraid," she concedes, "but it so difficult to help people whom one is obliged to keep at a distance" (113). Naomi, the family member who works as fruit vendor, offers "much larger and fresher" fruit for sale than her competition. "I give her a few pence sometimes, but there are so many to help and a clergyman's income is so small," Merribell tells Marion (113). Naomi is transformed into a dependent beggar. The narrative implies that all Antiguans need to be as vigilant as Merribell.

Cassin draws a strong contrast between the plenty of the table of the elite white family and the "narrow range of existence" for white women (94) that sustain their racialized class position. Her narrative compassionates their losses and circumscriptions. The theme draws attention to a further influence of *Persuasion*, a novel similarly "concerned with the ways people adjust to loss, or curtailment of life, and live through, or cope with, its deprivations," the "resources of the human spirit in the face of affliction" (Wiltshire 165-166). With telling symbolism "dust and megass" (the juiceless detritus of milled cane) are "blown in at the windows" of estate houses, bringing about adjustments of English lifestyles. Mrs. Agnes Latrobe anticipates that Marion will find the West Indies "very dull after ... English life," a "vegetat[ion]" (51). The life of white women in the West Indies is summed up variously by a local minister Mr Browncave, Mrs Latrobe's brother-in-law, as "petty surroundings" (93), untrained (94), "pinned down" (95). The risk is a torpidity like that of Terpy Cadwallader produced by a "cramped, imprisoned, undeveloped life ... bounded by the prices of sugar, the flirtations of ... smarter acquaintances, and unhealthy dreams of a romance never to be fulfilled" (88), or Creoles "eat[ing] out their hearts with complaining unrest" (95). Mr. Browncave moralizes that, "our minds create our own atmosphere about us and can supply their own

interests even in the West Indies” (96). Cassin favors education of women and travel as helping the mind supply those interests, suggesting that local elite culture does not provide intellectual or mental sustenance for women. Female English settlers, “wives or daughters of doctors, lawyers, government officials, clergymen, merchants and so forth” cope better with the narrow life, as “their brains are cultivated” (95). The educated English visitor Marion is shown to be more liberal on the racial questions raised by Thekla’s marriage to a colored man than local white Creole women.

Morea copes with the blandness of daily routine, a “mained fettered existence” (124) through fashioning “gay plumage” for herself that her mother thinks shows “a plebian cast of character” (64): clothes and outfits, and interior decoration of her bedroom. Her taste is aligned with Mammy Doodle’s. Mammy Doodle wears a “large gay bandanna handkerchief” over her shoulders and another as a turban (56). Morea explains to Marion of her own attire:

I am only allowed to indulge in my gay plumage in the daytime, on condition that I wear whatever dresses Mamma chooses to have sent out for me from England, at dinner or in the evening. So you see me squeezed into the horrible, stylish, uncomfortable thing, in which I feel like a doll or fashion-plate, instead of Morea Latrobe, and Mammy Doodle has orders every evening to drag my hair up in this wretched coil, the latest fashion in that stupid Paris I believe, and I groan all the time, and Mammy Doodle sheds tears over my discomfort if she persists, and Miss Agnes’s anger if she doesn’t. (64)

“[C]olour, colour, colour, I like to wrap myself up in it,” she announces to Marion (64). Her formulation suggests that color is eclectic display, vivacity of spirit, and warm shelter. In retrospect Morea feels keenly her lack of educational opportunities while growing up, though “[n]ow-a-days there are Grammar Schools, and High Schools being started out here ... Mamma wouldn’t send me to England” (61). Cassin suggests that Mrs. Latrobe has not wanted to part with her youngest daughter, relating this to a compounded sense of loss: the deaths of her brother James, her husband, only son Henry, and her physical and emotional separation from her older three daughters.

In *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture*, Barbara Browning observes that “[t]he metaphor of contagion ... often takes seemingly benign forms (‘infectious rhythm’ as a dispersal of joy), but it can also often lead to hostile, even violent, reactions to cultural expressions” (7). In relation to the placid English Aird family, Morea’s wrapping herself in color is represented as variously endearing, disarming, seductive, and contagious, in Browning’s terms, “irresistible—vital, life-giving, and productive” (7). Given the prominence of India in the 1889-91 leprosy panic, it is significant that her beauty is described as of a “quaint Eastern type” (54). The wrapping in color, a sign of her colonial diasporic cultural difference, is also expressed through narrating her Creoleness and a collection of amusing “nancy stories” (136), and stories of local black people in which they figure as objects rather

than subjects of narration. She does not speak with a West Indian accent, the drawl for which white Creole women were renowned (O'Callaghan, *Women Writing* 134). Morea and Cassin reproduce West Indian patois in the direct speech of black characters in their stories. Morea's gift for linguistic mimicry readers are told is also exercised against staid English Elizabeth, but only for Marion's benefit in a "private audience" (135). Selwyn, destined for a "sober earnest profession" (129), is sidetracked into "erratic peregrinations" (135), "completely fascinated" by Morea's "bright piquant bird-nature" and their "frank camaraderie" (135). He engages in a "red-hot and yet easy-going courtship" which alarms his sister Elizabeth (138). To her the cross-cultural marriage is imprudent and improvident financially and in terms of character building. Both Morea and Selwyn are in her eyes only "in process of development" (140), "[d]eluded babies" (145).

Browning addresses contemporary African diasporic culture in the context of epidemiological discourses around AIDS. A key argument of hers, though, is applicable to Cassin's representation of colonial diasporic culture in the context of the 1889-91 leprosy panic. For O'Callaghan Cassin uses leprosy "the horrific disease as a trope for the hidden shame of miscegenation, and more generally, for the contagious sickness of the West Indian post-slavery society" (Introduction 21). Browning argues: "The metaphor [of contagion] is invoked—often in the guise of a 'literal' threat—at moments of anxiety over diasporic flows, whether migrational or cultural. At this juncture, the figure has accrued new significance, and new virulence" (6). Selwyn breezily dismisses Elizabeth's reservations about his marriage to Morea, but the text does not. Generically the cross-cultural romance plot moves to tragedy. Closure is in realist critical paradigms, as Catherine Belsey points out, "disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the reestablishment of order, recognizable as a reinstatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself" (70). The presentiments that underpin the narrative's enigma are realized in the diagnosis of Morea's leprosy. The order is the imperial and colonial disease network over which there was global panic. Given her persuasion on the question of control of leprosy, Cassin, as responsible, topical, prudent and provident author, needs to promote the racial duty of segregation.

The novel closes three years after the diagnosis with Morea's death and the promise of a future marriage between the grieving Selwyn and Marion, who is just the kind of Englishwoman Elizabeth would have recommended to her brother as a partner. O'Callaghan points out: "As in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the implication is that the contaminated creole wife must die before the English hero is able to make the more sensible marriage to one of his *own kind*" (Introduction 28).

Mrs. Agnes Latrobe, née Aird, is Cassin's deepest character study. She comments with rare candor to Marion of her daughters Leonie and Zephine, "if I died tonight those children would miss me less than their favourite maid," and of Morea, "I am not necessary even to her, she would miss Mammy Doodle infinitely more" (82-83). O'Callaghan notes:

Throughout the slavery period and well into the twentieth century ... privileged white children were largely socialized in their early years by black women of the servant class. ... In handing over her children to a black nanny, the mistress relinquished a great deal of her influence over these children; correspondingly, the nanny, nurse, or "nurse-girl" implicitly gained status within the transaction, while presumably relinquishing the care of her own children to others. (Notes 175)

Mammy Doodle's years of service to the Aird siblings and later the Latrobe siblings have left her "tired all de time" (58). In England Morea does miss Mammy Doodle more than her mother. In middle age Mrs. Latrobe is jealous of lower-class women, implicitly with few servants, whose "little homes" and "little incomes" have given them the scope to develop closer relationships with their children (83). Even here, though, she shows the limits of her understanding of love, conceptualizing it as a reward for dependence on service. Mrs. Latrobe's sister Darling, who marries clergyman Mr. Browncave, has a closer relationship with her daughter Merriebell, and her duties as a clergyman's wife have enriched her character. Both have provided her with the resources to cope with approaching blindness. Burdened with the grief of compound losses, Mrs. Latrobe looks to a "very secluded life" (59) and the custom of a highly ritualized, conservative planter way of life to structure her everyday routines. This custom, stiff propriety, pride of status, aloofness and inflexibility support and nurse her in her grief. They also make her a threatening figure for the young nurse-girl Scintilia, who fears a severe scolding, and probable loss of her position—Eliza even suggests imprisonment—after Pete touches Morea. In contrasting Scintilia's failure to own up to what has happened in "A Picture" and Selwyn's taking of responsibility for Marion's accident, Cassin does acknowledge the probable legitimacy of Scintilia's fear of loss of her position. Cassin implies that Mrs. Latrobe's habitual strategies for coping with grief produce an emotional numbness; one of the ravages of untreated leprosy is nerve damage that produces physical numbness in feet, hands, and facial skin. Cassin's character portrait, built up through layers of explanation, is both compassionate over Mrs. Latrobe's griefs, and, as O'Callaghan suggests, harshly critical of "the old ways" to which she retreats (Introduction 31).

Thekla emerges at one point in Merriebell's story of her marriage to a colored man as a prospective figure of liberal progress, a woman willing to relate romantically and sexually to his humanity, to bring to marriage her bounty and ardor, and to brave the threat of social ostracism. In allegorical terms the marriage is not fertile. Rather, Mrs. Latrobe's intransigent failure to lead local opinion in her son-in-law's favor by recognizing the union blights the man's employment prospects, the husband loses "heart" and "hope" and develops the leprosy which literalizes in the text's discourse of miscegenation his racial and cultural contamination of Thekla; and Thekla has recriminations that "instead of being a stepping-stone to a higher position, their marriage had actually been a drag upon him and had kept him perhaps, from making his way to a fresh country" (109). The social ostracism of the couple is reproduced at a narrative level. The narrative dramatizes the daily lives of several families; theirs together is off limits. Merriebell, in

narrating their story, while acknowledging the insular racism of the island, emphasizes herself the man's "brown skin," "disreputable Negro parents" (106), "bare-foot" mother (104), and "genteelly vulgar" sister (105), and that his psychological tragedy stems from the unrealistic expectations raised by his anomalous education.

Resituating *With Silent Tread* in relation to the leprosy panic of 1889-91 shows that Cassin has been persuaded by alarmist accounts of disease transmission, and desires to make a highly topical intervention in Antiguan public discussion of disease control. Cassin both engages with and shares anxieties about colonial "diasporic flows," "migrational" and "cultural" (Browning 6) in relation to the disease networks created and sustained by imperial expansion and to the gender, class and racial formations of a plantation culture. To place *With Silent Tread* as part of a usable past in the representation of leprosy the limits and scope of its understandings of the disease and its stigma, which we can read with historical hindsight, must be acknowledged.

Notes

¹*Antigua Observer* 28 August 1890: 2.

²O'Callaghan speculates that "it is likely that Frieda Cassin's family were English derived, and resident for some time in the Eastern Caribbean" (Introduction 13). In "New Literary Venture 'The Carib,'" published in the *Antigua Observer* on 11 April 1895, J.H.A. identifies "Miss Frieda Cassin" as a "native of Antigua." The terms of J.H.A.'s praise are highly gendered. Her editorial effort is suitably feminine: "neatly got up, cleanly printed," "modest," and, "like the chief product of this Island," a "sweet and wholesome little literary production in the lighter vein." O'Callaghan cites sources which place publication of the journal as "circa 1880" (Introduction 14). J.H.A. describes Cassin's contribution to the first number of *The Carib* "An Ebony Angel" as a "humourous" story "showing the faithful, if odd character of old negro servants where their affections are enlisted." This suggests its genre is the "local colour" sketch: self-consciously regional, stereotypical in its treatment of racial difference and interaction, sentimental.

³O'Callaghan writes that "[w]here leprosy was suspected, the immediate official response was segregation of the infected" (Introduction 19).

⁴Their quotation is from *Report of the Leprosy Commission in India* (London: Clowes, 1893), 5-7.

⁵His recommendations were:

1st That compulsory segregation be at once adopted.

2nd That on no pretence whatever should a leper be allowed to leave the precinct of the Asylum after being admitted.

3rd That certain rules be framed, and authority given to enforce the same on the inmates of the several asylums.

4th That a definite, and arranged line of medical, and other treatment be agreed upon for the various asylums throughout the colony, and the results carefully noted, and from time to time discussed by the medical officers attached to these institutions.

5th That arm to arm vaccination be most carefully conducted, and strict enquiries made into the family history of the subject, or source from which vaccine lymph is taken and dispensed.

6th To inspect minutely, and more frequently condemn if necessary the food that is every day retailed for the consumption of the labouring population, and every encouragement given to increase the cultivation of native provisions, as well as fresh and wholesome vegetables. (3)

⁶The source is *Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda: A Historical Sketch* (St John's: Museum of Antigua and Barbuda, 1991), 12.

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